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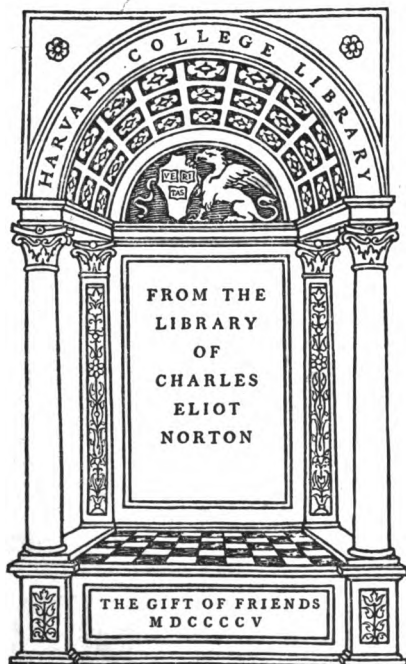
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William medford

THE FIVE NIGHTS

OF

ST. ALBANS.

A ROMANCE OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

BY THE

Author of "First and Last."

"A MYSTERY, envelop'd in a cloud
Of CHARMING HORROR, barricadoed round
With dainty riddles; guarded by a crowd
Of quiet contradictions."

BEAUMONT'S PSYCHE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

THE FIRST AMERICAN, FROM THE SECOND LONDON EDITION.

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THE
FIVE NIGHTS

OF

ST. ALBANS.

CHAPTER I.

THE occurrences of this day had awakened busy thoughts in the minds of all. To Peverell, they seemed like a dream. The discovery of Fortescue's body—the manner of its discovery—the appearance of Helen—the subsequent interview with her—her inexplicable demanding of the golden signet—the crystal cross and its fluid scroll—the mysterious disappearance of Fortescue's corse—the first visit of Fitz-Maurice at Lacy's—his demeanour there at his second one—his significant conversation with Overbury—and the new light thrown upon his character and situation, by the manifest power which the dwarf had over him—the whole passed in review before him, and added fresh perplexity to his already agitated thoughts.

Lacy found himself entangled in a difficulty, separate and distinct from all considerations connected with the general current of events. He shared, with the rest, in all their feelings of surprise and embarrassment: but there seemed to be circumstances attaching themselves to the cross, so exclusively affecting himself, that he was impatient for the opportunity of confirming or annihilating his doubts.

As to De Clare, he shrunk almost from reflecting on what had passed. If there were one quality, upon the

possession of which, more than any other, he prided himself, it was that of being elevated above the ordinary passions and prejudices of mankind. He had so pampered a moody and wayward spirit, had rioted so long in the belief of this superiority, that when he found himself rebuked and held in check by Fitz-Maurice, his will led captive by him, and his premeditated conclusions dissolved in his presence, like snow-drift at the first touch of the sun's rays, he was almost tempted to question his own identity. He had, all his life, been accustomed to lead others; and now, to find himself silenced, rather than convinced—forbidden, rather than subdued—the follower, instead of the followed, he felt, at once, astonishment and scorn; astonishment, at influence he had never before experienced; and scorn, that he had foregone his wonted supremacy. Hence, his splenetic declaration, that he had bound his reason the slave of his senses for four days, and was resolved to wear his chains meekly the while. This confession had been wrung from his wounded pride. He could not burst his fetters, and he strove to wear them with a smiling face.

But what were Wilfrid Overbury's reflections? With what feelings did he seek his midnight pillow? A dismal crime had lain festering in his heart for years; it was hell to him whenever it reared its accusing form before his conscience, and few were the days in which it slumbered—but it was hell, tenfold sharpened and imbibited, to think there walked the earth one human being who could blast his soul with the appalling words, *thus didst thou!* And yet this withering thought possessed him now. He did not know, but dreadfully he feared, that Fitz-Maurice, by some means as awful as his own offence, was the master of his fate. He writhed in agony under the bare suspicion; and so tormenting was the suspicion, that he resolved, when next they met, to rid himself of it, even at the hazard of a certainty which he knew would destroy him.

From this group of anxious minds and throbbing hearts, the poor, distracted Helen, must not be excluded. Possessed of the signet, and, as she believed, of all the history which Peverell had to relate, she sought her chamber, there to reflect on the past, and there to arm herself with resolution for what was to come. The image of Fitz-

Maurice mingled with all her thoughts. She might as well have attempted to banish thought itself, as to forbid the intrusion of Fitz-Maurice's figure, his words, his looks, and his untold, but darkly hinted misfortunes.— She knew not why; but if her father were in his grave, she felt there would still be another in the world, whose happiness concerned her. And one short hour had done all this! In one little hour, Fitz-Maurice had divided a heart, which, till then, was her father's only! She blushed to think it was so: but, alas! her blushes only confirmed, instead of denying that it was so.

And why was it? How was it? She knew herself no love-sick girl. It was no wandering passion of a newly awakened heart, fixed upon its fated object in a predestined moment. Her studious habits, her retired life, her severe self-discipline, the singleness of her filial devotion—every thing conspired to guard *her* from a danger to which even the million of her sex were not so helplessly exposed. She disdained, almost, to vindicate herself, even in the secrecy of her own bosom, from what she would have considered so degrading a weakness. Still, amid all this loftiness of feeling, amid all this austere schooling of her motives, there remained the undeniable fact, which she could not gainsay, that her heart yearned for the solace of at least mitigating, if she could not remove, the afflictions that bowed down the head of Fitz-Maurice. Tears would start in her eyes as often as she recalled the thrilling tones, the mournful expressions, and the deep pathos with which (brief as the mention of them was,) he had dwelt upon his sufferings; upon that history, so sad, so full of woe; that life of sharp adversity; that prolonged and ceaseless agony, which had steeped him in veriest wretchedness.

It was in vain she strove to banish these reflections; for then, others, equally painful, and some, infinitely more so, rushed into her mind. Foremost of the latter, was her approaching visit to Margery Ashwell. The night was fast wearing away, as she sat, meditating upon this trial, when Bridget entered, with a request from Lacy, that Helen would speak with him, before she retired to bed. The summons was unexpected; and she felt it could not be obeyed. There was no time for an interview with her father; but had there been, it was an experiment every way too dangerous to be hazarded. She returned an an-

swer, therefore, that it would be an indulgence if she might be permitted to defer attending him, till the morning. She knew her wish would be complied with; and it was; though Lacy was more than usually anxious for an interview.

Helen would have found many difficulties to overcome, in executing her plan, had not little Bridget fortunately contrived to light up a passion in the heart of Andrew Stubbs; and which passion never burned so pleasantly to himself, as when he was doing some kind office for the idol of his affections. Now Andrew Stubbs was the chief, or confidential servant, of Lacy's household, and to him was specially trusted the charge of nightly barring and bolting, fastening and securing, all the doors, windows, gates, posterns and lattices of the mansion. It was absolutely necessary, therefore, that Andrew's services should be secured on this occasion; and Bridget readily undertook to manage the negotiation. In what particular way she carried it on—what use she may have made of her eyes and lips,—what *thens* followed certain *ifs*—as, "*if* you'll do so and so, Andrew, *then* who knows how soon I may listen more favourably to what you are always talking about,"—or, whether there was an absolute *if*, with a positive *then*, at the tail of it, were secrets known only to themselves. Certain it is, however, that Andrew permitted Bridget to put into her pocket, a key, without the possession of which, Helen could not have quitted the house. And he farther consented, or promised, to be fast asleep by eleven o'clock, and hear nothing, though his bed-room was close to the door which had to be opened, and the hinges of which, moreover, creaked out for grease, whenever they were put into requisition.

Thus far, then, one great obstacle was removed. Helen, however, shrunk with the natural timidity of her sex, from the dark and dreary walk she would have to the cottage of Margery, with only her faithful and attached Bridget for her companion, whose own heart sunk within her as the hour drew near; though she would have died, rather than confess a single fear that might add to those of her mistress. Helen, indeed, was to honest Bridget, what Lacy was to Helen herself. Any thing less than her father's safety, could never have moved the latter to so arduous an enterprise; and any thing less than to serve her dear ladyship, would never have tempted the former

to visit a witch at midnight. It was more the instinctive dread of setting forth at such an hour, to traverse an extent of above two miles, either over fields, or by narrow lanes, and an instant anticipation of those identical difficulties, which Bridget had vanquished by the power of her charms over Andrew, than any feeling of increased terror because her ordeal was to be at midnight, that had made Helen reiterate the question to Margery, when she named that solemn hour for her return.

There were several paths which led to Margery Ashwell's cottage from the town of St. Albans; but only two of them could perplex the choice of Helen, when, in darkness, she had to pursue either. Should she attempt to explore the fields, trusting to Bridget's knowledge? Or keep to the lanes, which, though miry, and rendered additionally gloomy, by overhanging trees, led directly to the spot? Bridget's voice was for the former: but Helen resolved to leave the decision to circumstances as they might present themselves.

It was now something more than a quarter past eleven, and Helen prepared for her departure. She gently opened her chamber door. All was silent; her father had retired for the night, and the servants had sought their several beds. Helen was wrapped in a large velvet mantle, and Bridget had fastened on her stout winter cloak, not forgetting to provide herself with a lanthorn. Helen beckoned her to follow, and with a trembling step she passed the door of the room where her father slept. Descending a long flight of oaken stairs, which creaked beneath her sylph-like tread, they reached the small portal that opened upon the terrace, when Bridget, fumbling for the key, discovered that she had left it on a table in Helen's chamber. "I know where it is," said Bridget in a whisper, and softly re-ascended the stairs. In a few moments, Helen perceived on the walls, the dim flashes of the lanthorn, and saw Bridget returning, holding up the key in token of her success. In another moment they were upon the terrace, and the portal securely fastened behind them.

The night was not dark, for the moon was in her second quarter; and though there were black, and stormy clouds sailing along the sky, she gave light enough to distinguish surrounding objects. They hastily descended the stone steps of the terrace, and found the small gate at the bot-

tom open, as had been agreed upon between Bridget and Andrew. They soon gained the public road, and in less than five minutes, were beyond the limits of the town. At this instant, Helen was startled by the approaching sound of horse's feet; but before she could speak her fears, Fitz-Maurice stood by her side!

"The hour is still; the road is lonesome," he exclaimed, "Will Helen Lacy let Fitz-Maurice be her guide?"

Little Bridget, who thought she began to smell a rat, considered whether it would have been as well if *she*, too, had *unexpectedly* met Andrew. But she held her tongue.

"You distress me," said Helen with a trembling voice.

"I told you we should meet again," replied Fitz-Maurice; "and when more proper than at a moment like this?"

"When less so?" answered Helen.

"There is no time for words," replied Fitz-Maurice; "my Arab steed is near, and dare Helen Lacy trust herself on its back, the moments are few that would suffice to bring her to the cottage of Margery Ashwell!"

"I am attended," said Helen with increasing confusion.

"I see you are: I knew you would be; and my page waits, no worse mounted than myself, to follow whither we go."

"I am not skilled in such ungentle exercise," responded Helen, retiring a few paces.

"There shall need no skill, lady," said Fitz-Maurice. "My fleet Arabian is fitly caparisoned for so precious a burden; and when he proudly bears it, my hand shall guide him."

"Ride, your ladyship!" exclaimed Bridget, in a whisper. "Better than walking."

"In sooth," continued Helen, "I like not this. A maiden's fair name might suffer, for much less real cause, than what here seems. Why have you done thus?"

"To serve and save!" answered Fitz-Maurice, emphatically.

"To save!" exclaimed Helen, faintly.—"Whom!—From what?"

"You!" said Fitz-Maurice, with a mournful tenderness of voice. "You! whose purpose is so holy, that it might clothe you with sanctity, and hallow your very footsteps. But be forewarned—sacrilege will dare profane even the altar."

It was with much difficulty Helen could refrain from tears. It seemed as if she was doomed to trials beyond her strength, and that they multiplied about her each moment. She was irresolute what to do now; but certainly would have returned instantly, were it not that she had set forth, as she firmly believed, to save a father's life. The words of Fitz-Maurice, on the other hand, had awakened fears, which made her shudder at the thought of proceeding. The recollection of Fortescue's murder, and the bare possibility of other perils, too horrible to dwell upon, presented themselves to her mind.

"You hesitate," continued Fitz-Maurice. "and time flies. Speak, for delay must cease. How shall it be?"

"My weakness triumphs," said Helen, sighing. "I own I have not fortitude, after what you have darkly hinted, to proceed onwards, with only this simple wench for my protection in case of need."

Fitz-Maurice gave a signal, and instantly his dwarf appeared on horseback, leading by his side, the pawing, snorting, and fiery steed of his master. Fitz-Maurice patted his gracefully arched neck, and placing Helen on his back, which he accomplished with an ease and dexterity that amazed her, he sprang into his own seat, and gave the noble animal the rein. Helen was surprised to find the saddle so contrived, that she sat with equal ease and security.

Poor Bridget! when she saw her mistress bound away, without saying one word to her, (which in the confusion of her feelings, she wholly forgot,) all she uttered was, "Soon be there!"

"Not before we are," croaked a voice close at her ear. "Mount!"

She had not observed that the dwarf remained; and she started at hearing him. But she lost no time in obeying his command, and began to scramble, in the best way she could, upon the crupper of the horse, when he, growing impatient, grasped her by the arm, and hauled her at once into her seat.

"Strong tug for a boy!" exclaimed Bridget as soon as she recovered her breath a little, and mistaking the deformed dwarf, for no older than his diminutive stature seemed to warrant.

The moment she was up, Mephosto spoke to his steed,

and it sprang off. Bridget had nearly sprung off too; for, losing her balance, the only thing that saved her, was clinging to Mephosto's neck, which she did with right good will, resigning the lanthorn, till now dangling at her finger's end, to its fate in the mire.

"Hold fast!" said the dwarf, with a snarling chuckle, which bespoke that he enjoyed the consternation of Bridget. "Do you like riding?"

"I will—very much," quoth Bridget; and then muttered to herself, "devil of a gallop! what a bump!"

It was not long before Mephosto was close at the heels of Fitz-Maurice's courser, which, like his own, seemed to glide or skim over the ground, rather than to touch it. Helen even fancied, once or twice, that they cleared fences and other obstructions as if they were of no substance in themselves; and Bridget was actually astonished at finding herself, as she thought, passing through a quick-set hedge without receiving a scratch.

Fitz-Maurice spoke not a word till he arrived within a few yards of Margery's cottage. He then stopped—leaped to the earth—assisted Helen to descend—and again mounting, exclaimed, as he galloped off, "I shall be here again, ere you are."

Mephosto, mean while, had deposited Bridget by the side of her mistress, and followed Fitz-Maurice.



CHAPTER II.

It was not till now that Helen imparted to Bridget the worst tidings she had yet heard, namely, that she must not enter the cottage.

"Stay by myself!" said Bridget. "In this dark place! A witch at my elbow! What can I do!"

Helen felt more than she thought it prudent to express, for the situation of her faithful attendant, whose fears would only be increased by the disclosure of her own. She strove to encourage her, therefore, by assuring her that she had nothing to dread from the "witch at her elbow,"

as she expressed it, and as little from any human being. The place was not very dark, she observed; and though lonely, it was doubtless safe enough. Besides, if any thing did happen, to terrify her much, she might run every hazard, and take refuge with herself, in Margery's cottage. This alternative, under all circumstances, Bridget considered as but a ticklish kind of consolation. However, she was about to accept it, for want of a better, and consented to leave Helen at the door, when she learned that a farther trouble awaited her.

Helen remembered the positive injunction of the hag, in answer to her inquiry whether she must be alone. "Alone, *when* you pass my threshold, nor must man, woman, or child be within ear shot *after*." Bridget, therefore, could not approach nearer, than where she then stood.

"I shall return soon," said Helen; "and see, here is a rudely carved seat, wrought in the huge trunk of this withered oak, where you can sit, sheltered from the wind, which is sharp to-night; and be also unseen, if, which is most improbable, any stranger foot should pass this way."

They had neither of them noticed this quaint recess before; but at that moment, the moon emerged from a bluish vapour or cloud that hovered around it, and discovered it to their view. It was such a natural alcove or bower, (for it was evidently the work of no other hand, than that of time, which had thus fantastically mouldered it into its present state) as, at any moment but this, would have pleased the romantic fancy of Helen. Bridget peeped into it—ventured one leg—looked up,—slowly drew in the other leg—and, turning herself cautiously round, sat down upon a moss-covered projection, ejaculating, "Plenty of bats and owls for company, I dare say!"

Helen could scarcely refrain from smiling, anxious, oppressed, and even terrified as she herself was, when she saw little Bridget curled up in her nest, like a snail in its shell. But, at that moment, she heard the slow, reverberating sound of the Abbey bell, tolling the hour of twelve. "Even with the hour—even with the very hour!" were the words of Margery. The breeze that bore the awful summons upon its wings, seemed to sigh mournfully in her ears. The moon hid her light behind a ridge of murky clouds, silvering their edges with pale effulgence. Helen

hurried forward, after faintly bidding Bridget be of good cheer; and as her trembling hand tapped at the door of Margery Ashwell's cottage, her eyes caught an indistinct glimpse of a pillar of fire, which seemed to ascend from what appeared to her to be the roof of the Abbey, judging by its distance and position.

The door was opened by the old, gray, blind baboon, which Helen had observed in the morning. When she had entered, the creature closed it again, and then stretched its length along the threshold, as if to guard it from intrusion.

"I heard you on the way," said Margery. "But hush!—speak not till I bid you. One earthly word, pronounced too soon, and all is vain."

Helen obeyed a motion of her hand, and stood in that part of the room to which she pointed. With a beating heart, she watched the motions of the hag.

The brazen caldron in which she had seen the brood of rats sweltering in blood, had been removed. It was now placed within a small circle, formed of various ghastly things. Many of them Helen knew not, save that they were loathsome, and frightful to the sight. Others she could not mistake, though she could scarcely endure to look at them. Human skulls glared upon her, with eyes that were stolen from panthers, leopards, and tigers. Some had pale, blue lights, dimly burning in their sockets; others, which were dark and eyeless, grinned at her with monstrous teeth, like the tusks of the wild boar; or glowing as composed of red-hot iron. There stood a coffin, not a span long, with the untimely yielded burden of an abortive womb in it; and close by its side, the delicate white pap of the dead mother, seemingly fresh severed from the body. A knife, crusted with blood, was fitted into the throat it had cut, which lay, still dripping, in the hellish circle. There, too, was a cadaverous heart, half gnawed away, as if it had been tossed for food to the blood-sweltered rats. A gray scalp, with the skeleton fingers of a clenched hand, tugging at the thinly scattered hairs, was beside it; and Helen fancied it might have belonged to some despairing wretch, who had died blaspheming! Between these horrible objects, burned low, red flames, issuing from human fat and flesh, and emitting a most noisome smell. Various withered herbs, and

nameless substances of strange shape and colour, helped to complete the hideous preparation.

Margery Ashwell walked round and round, leaning on a small, black stick, which, in appearance, resembled a twisted serpent. During the whole time, she was gabbling an unintelligible gibberish, and kept her eyes fixed upon the caldron, in which Helen perceived a waxen image, which, though, of pigmy size, seemed strongly to resemble her father. In its hand, was a tiny sword, and above its head waved a small, red ensign. The image floated in a dark-coloured fluid, which was seething and bubbling up, though there were no visible appearances of any fire under or near the caldron. Every now and then Margery dropped in some yellow powder, prepared from the dried marrow of a self-murderer, the eyes of a basilisk, and the wing of a night raven, carrion-killed in a church-yard. This ingredient, as it fell into the caldron, produced momentary flashes of deep crimson-coloured flame. She also took the phial in which the toad was confined, and opening it, poured in three drops of a thick, black, slimy liquid, the reptile uttering a sharp cry or shriek, as each drop descended.

Margery now laid herself flat down, with her mouth close to the ground, and remained in that position for several minutes, writhing her limbs, and pronouncing strange words. Sometimes she was still and motionless.

She arose. Her look was angry. "There is some power near, or at work," said she, "which he dreads. I heard his groan in the centre of the earth."

Helen remembered the signet, and felt it clip her finger with a burning pressure.

"I will tear him up," she continued, stamping her foot violently, "though his yells affright the dead, and drive back the moon from her path in the heavens! I am strong enough for that."

She threw her crutch upon the ground, and exclaimed, "Unfold thyself!"

Helen gazed with mute terror, as she saw the crutch heave, and swell, and enlarge itself, till it gradually assumed the shape of an enormous black serpent, curling and waving about in mazy folds.

"Suck me one drachm of blood!" continued the hag,

uncovering her withered neck, and dragging out a shrivelled breast.

The reptile coiled itself round her body, with a hissing noise, and its eyes gleaming like two rubies. Helen shuddered; and the hag herself screamed, when the serpent darted its forked tongue into her nipple!

“Bravely done!” she exclaimed. “Hold it till I bid thee; and then void it, drop by drop, in the caldron! Each charmed drop is able to confound the elements, and make turretted castles rock to their foundations in the sudden tempest. But it must fall on the precious syrup made of child’s grease, melted by a blue fire, kindled with lizard’s brains, or it will not have the power to compel Alascon, when he is moody.”

She then poured some of this “precious syrup” into the caldron, and walked to the four corners of the room, exclaiming, “I call you from the east—I call you from the west—I call you from the south—I call you from the north!” She next stood in the middle of the room, and whirled round three times, saying all the while, “I call you from graves, from woods, from fens and from rocks! I call you from the deep river and the stagnant pool—I call you from charnel houses, and the grave of the unbaptized babe!”

Helen remained motionless—silent—but almost frenzied! Her cheek was pale—her eye wildly following every motion of Margery—her body trembling. The incantation had already gone beyond her acquaintance with such fearful rites; and she knew Margery was now working by tremendously powerful charms—an exertion of her art which she shuddered to think was probably required, in consequence of that golden signet on her finger. She began to dread, too, lest her resolution should be subdued by the intensity of her excited feelings. Once or twice, it required all the command she could still exercise over herself, to refrain from giving utterance to her agony of mind, though she knew a single word from her, even a half stifled exclamation, would destroy the whole.

The hag now bade the serpent give the charmed blood, drop by drop; and no sooner had the gorged creature, rearing its wreathed neck, distilled the warm gore from its opening jaws, than Helen’s ears were assailed by the most dismal wailings, and by deep, hollow groans from

beneath her feet. The walls shook—the earth trembled—the loathsome objects which formed the circle leaped and danced about—skulls rattled against skulls—the iron teeth chattered—the low red flames issuing from the unhallowed human fat and flesh, blazed like torches—the thunder pealed, and the blue lightning flashed—and there were loud howling and screaming, as if the place were filled with ravening wolves and famished eagles.

In the midst of this wild tumult of unearthly noises, the voice of Margery was heard, crying aloud, “Arise, Alascon!—Alascon arise!—Ascend, mighty spirit of the future!”

Helen’s eyes grew dim: but she could faintly discern, in the centre of the circle, a bright shadow slowly ascending, clothed in purple and gold, with flowing hair of the colour of amber, and bearing a glass in its hands. A thin vapour floated round the spectre, which, though it did not obscure, was sufficient to veil the features.

A profound and awful silence succeeded to the terrific din which had just prevailed. Helen scarcely breathed. The dread moment had arrived! She stood on the brink of knowledge which her heart now quaked to learn. Her hereafter—the destiny that awaited her—was to be spread open before her. A marble statue, chiselled to the life, might have cheated the beholder into a belief that it breathed, sooner than the bloodless cheeks, fixed eyes, and motionless figure of Helen should have been pronounced alive. She looked, a form of monumental alabaster.

“I am here! fell enchantress!” exclaimed the spirit—“and would be gone!”

“Now, maiden, speak!” said Margery. “Ask—and be resolved of what you ask!”

Helen started. She was bewildered: she knew not what to say.

“Speak! speak!” repeated the hag—“Quick!—Quick!—I cannot hold him while a swallow skims thrice o’er the mantled pool.”

“The Abbey!—my father!—what danger?” stammered Helen—but her voice was choked!

“Idiot! traitress!” exclaimed Margery, stamping her foot furiously, “speak what thou wouldst, or I’ll tear that treacherous tongue out, and waste your young body,

that thou shalt be more years dying than thou hast yet lived! My own fate hangs upon you!"

Helen, terrified by the frantic looks and words of the hag, who raved like a maniac, rallied her sinking spirits.

"Tell me, if thou canst," said she, "what these mysterious signs in the Abbey portend?"

"A mighty triumph—or a dire evil," replied the spirit.

"Who shall win the triumph?" said Helen.

"He who wins thee!"

"How shall the dire evil be avoided?"

"By the blood, which is precious to the hand that sheds it."

"What is the triumph?"

"Redemption!"

"Of what?"

"A symbol."

"What is the evil?"

"The tears of the orphan and the widow. No more! I would be dismissed!"

"One question more!" exclaimed Helen firmly. "Are the days of my father's life numbered?"

The spirit was silent.

"He will not answer that," said Margery. "The lights burn low—are you satisfied?"

Helen remembered the signet. It was impossible she could return ignorant of the only thing for which she had undergone this terrific scene. Not a moment was to be lost.

"*If thou refuse answer to earth-born powers,*" exclaimed Helen, with an overwrought energy, bordering almost on frenzy, "*I command thee—OBEY THE SIGNET!*" and she stretched forth her hand.

At these words the same wailing and howling, the same violent motions, the same agitation of the elements, and the same unearthly noises, took place, as when the hag's blood was dropped into the caldron. Margery herself grovelled on the earth, at the feet of Helen, as in worship of some mighty, though unseen, power. But now, all the low red flames that burned on the ground were extinguished, and the place was in total darkness, save a cloud of radiant light which enfolded the form of the spirit. Helen stood trembling and silent. All that she hoped or feared, all that she cared to live for, quivered on the next instant!

"Wilt thou be answered by one greater than myself?" exclaimed Alascon; "or shall thine eyes behold in this glass, that which thou wouldst know?"

"Let mine eyes behold!" replied Helen.

"Then look!—Lo, shadows appear!"

A mist obscured the glass for a moment. As it faded away, Helen perceived the likeness of Fitz-Maurice, kneeling, in the attitude of devotion, at her own feet. It vanished: and then she saw herself unfastening a ponderous chain, which hung about the neck of Fitz-Maurice. This disappeared: and Fitz-Maurice was again seen clad in complete armour, bearing a cross in one hand, and with the other, thrusting a spear through the body of a hideous monster, half human, half brute, which lay overthrown on the ground. Another vision!—It was a sepulchre: and on it, in large silver letters, was inscribed, *Helen Lacy!*—The tomb slowly opened, and she saw herself, in her grave-clothes, extended on a bier! Her spirit sunk within her; but, even as she gazed, the fleeting shadow passed away, and she beheld with horror her father writhing on the earth—his countenance full of agony, yet mingled with an expression of reproachful sorrow. A vulture was gnawing at his heart! But—oh! horror upon horror!—the vulture gradually melted from her sight, and in its place grew the figure of herself, thrusting a poignard where the beak of the vulture had appeared, buried in the heart of her father.

She saw no more. She uttered a loud shriek, and fell senseless.

When she recovered, she found herself supported by Fitz-Maurice, and in the open air. The moon was shining with mild lustre above her, and myriads of stars spangled the blue sky. Her faithful Bridget was bathing her hand, which she held in hers, with her warm tears.

"Where am I?" said Helen, with a deep sigh.

"On the terrace, dear, dear ladyship," replied Bridget, sobbing.

"My father! Where is he?" murmured Helen.

"In bed—asleep—why do you ask?" answered Bridget.

"What is the hour?" continued Helen.

"Hark!" said Bridget, "the chimes go; it is one!"

Her scattered thoughts began to recover themselves.

"One!" she exclaimed. "Only an hour: Alascon!—"

Fye!—It is all over!”—Then looking at Fitz-Maurice, and disengaging herself from his arms,—“are you HERE, too?” she said.

“I could not leave you,” replied Fitz-Maurice, “till now—but now, farewell!” He bowed—hastened down the steps of the terrace, threw himself across his fleet Arabian, and rode off, followed by his dwarf.

“Might have staid a little longer,” quoth Bridget. “How is your ladyship?”

“Better—well,” replied Helen. “Let us in.”

Bridget offered her arm to Helen, who leaned upon it, and with a tottering step reached the door, which Bridget softly opened. To her great comfort, though a little to her astonishment, she found a lamp burning, which, considering she had lost her lanthorn, was creditable to the fore-thought, if not to the fore-knowledge, of Andrew Stubbs.

Helen asked no questions; but hastening to her chamber, with all that silence which the occasion required, she dismissed Bridget for the night, and strove to lose in sleep the recollection of the dreadful trial she had sustained.—In vain!—Exhausted as she was, both in mind and body, a drowsy stupor, indeed, soon stole over her senses; but wild and haggard dreams persecuted her slumbers.



CHAPTER III.

IN the morning Helen was awakened by the sound of music. At first, she doubted whether they were mortal strains, or proceeded from viewless instruments, touched by some gentle spirit, hovering near her pillow. It was not from the celestial quality of the music itself, that she was in doubt; but from the still bewildered and feverish state of her mind, which was thronged with shadows, and with images of things, that belonged not to this world. By degrees, the consciousness of where she was stole over her, and she distinguished the sound of a harp,

which, as she now perceived, was being played beneath her window.

There was nothing very skilful in the performance; and yet there was something in the character of the airs, as well as in the expression imparted to them—a wild simplicity and careless grace, denoting less of art than of natural endowment in the minstrel, which fixed the attention of Helen. She listened. The sweet melody was soothing to her feelings. It was like a lenient balm dropped upon a rankling wound of the body; the anguish of her heart grew calm beneath the gentle harmony that now fell upon it.

She arose, and hastily throwing a loose robe about her, approached a window, which looked upon the terrace. It was a lovely morning: one of those parting autumnal mornings which, in their sunny mildness, and the clear freshness of the air, unite the first breathings of spring with the temperate warmth of summer. Helen threw open the casement, and the cool breeze was most grateful to her parched lips and burning skin.

The music ceased: but she observed on the terrace an aged, blind man, and, by his side, a rosy-cheeked girl, with flaxen hair, and bright blue eyes. She seemed about fourteen. The servants were gathered in a group round the venerable harper; and among them was Bridget, with her kind Andrew close to her.

A half-witted creature, named, or, rather, nick-named Robin the Conjuror, was capering about, throwing himself into sundry grotesque postures, to provoke laughter from the rest, in which he rarely failed; and then his own laugh was sure to be the loudest of all. Poor Robin had, certainly, at some time or other, had both a father and a mother; but neither he, nor any one else, could tell where or when. For many years he used to lie about in barns, out-houses, and fields, with no other care for food or raiment, than as the hand of casual charity might provide both. If a trusty messenger were wanted to discharge an errand ten or twenty miles across the country—if any assistance were suddenly needed within or without doors—Robin was immediately sought. He had not wit enough to be dishonest, or play the knave in any way. It was his supreme delight to be employed, no matter whether reward followed or not. This quality had gained him

many friends among those who possessed the very opposite quality, that of not liking to be employed; and Robin could seldom complain of having nothing to do. For the last two years he might be said to belong to Lacy's household; for, though no formal act of hiring took place, he fed in the kitchen, slept in a sort of lumber-room adjoining the stable, and wore the cast-off suits of Lacy himself.

While Helen was contemplating the scene from her window, she perceived Robin skip up to Bridget and say something to her. Immediately, the rosy-cheeked girl spoke to the sightless minstrel, while she looked towards Helen, and made a respectful obeisance to her. The servants, at the same time, drew back a little, so that no one stood between Helen and the harper, who now struck his harp again, and after running his fingers wildly but harmoniously over the strings, he glided gently into an air of surpassing tenderness and deep melancholy. Helen did not remember she had ever heard it before; yet it touched so true a chord of natural melody, that she listened to it, as to a strain which was quite familiar. It brought tears into her eyes; but they were a delicious sorrow, for they diffused peace over her soul, and seemed to let forth the grief which oppressed her, with each drop that fell.

After the harper had played the air once, the blue-eyed girl advanced a few paces towards the window at which Helen stood, and, accompanied by the instrument, sang, in a simple style, the following

ROUNDELAY.

I.

Oh! the maiden was gentle, the maiden was fair!
And the jewels that deck'd her were costly and rare;
But the ring on her finger was rarer than all,
Though it blaz'd not at banquet, at bridal or hall.

II.

Oh! the maiden was gentle, the maiden was fair,
And her young brow was darken'd with sorrow and care;
But the-care at her heart it was darker than all,
For it wrapt it in grief like a funeral pall.

III.

Oh! the maiden was gentle, the maiden was fair,
 And she sigh'd not for love, though love wrought her despair;
 But the pang of despair, which was keener than all,
 Was the pang of her SOUL for a word past recall!

The roundelay was no sooner ended, than the flaxen-haired lass made another respectful obeisance to Helen, tripped up to her aged companion, and led him gently from the terrace, followed by the servants.

Helen was entranced. The plaintive character of the air itself, and the pensive manner and artless tones with which the words had been given, still vibrated upon her ear. But the words themselves! *They* seemed to tell her own history—the history of the last few days. Yet it could not be so—it was impossible—and she felt that it would be simple weakness in her to think otherwise.

She had remained some minutes lost in meditation, when she was aroused from it by the antics of Robin, who had lingered behind, and was now dancing, jumping, and frolicking about, repeating the first line of the roundelay,

“Oh! the maiden was gentle, the maiden was fair!”

while ever and anon he cast up a laughing, merry look towards Helen, not unmixed with an arch expression of countenance, which was as intelligible as if he had said, “and I know who the maiden is, that is both gentle and fair.” Helen could not forbear smiling; but holding up her finger, as though to chide him for his freedom, she withdrew from the window.

Robin minded not so gracious a rebuke, for his eye caught the smile before the finger; and he danced away into the kitchen, nearly upsetting little Bridget in a dark passage, while he continued carolling forth,

“Oh! the maiden was gentle, the maiden was fair!”

till the old steward, who was a bachelor with nearly seventy winters on his head, and had no respect for maidens of any degree or complexion, silenced him with a sound box of the ear.

Bridget was hastening to her mistress, when Robin encountered her as aforesaid. Helen made various inquiries about the minstrel; but all she could learn from Bridget was, that Robin had met with him, and brought him

to give them a tune, while he danced for their amusement. He was a mere wandering harper, she believed; and the buxom wench who attended him was his granddaughter. When he learned that her "ladyship" was listening, he said, "Now, Cicely, sing that pretty roundelay which the stranger taught you yesterday, in the cottage, where we sheltered during the storm."

"It was beautiful, and strange," said Helen, musing.

"Very—not at all," replied Bridget.

"And why did he go immediately after? Did he say?"

"Don't know, I'm sure—no," answered Bridget.

"Whither went he?" continued Helen.

"Can't tell," said Bridget; "but belike Andrew can."

Helen's thoughts now reverted to the preceding night; and with as much composure as she could assume, she questioned Bridget upon the subject. Poor Bridget, however, had but little to tell. All she knew was, that she had fallen asleep in her oaken-bed chamber, soon after Helen had left her, and had slept so soundly, that it was only when "that toad of a page," (as she called Mephosto, in allusion to his voice) was hauling her up behind him, she awoke. "We scampered along," continued Bridget, "and I was soon popped down by your side, on the terrace. You were in his arms."

Helen felt the colour mantle over her cheeks, as Bridget thus plainly described what had been her situation. She knew it was not meant for saucy familiarity; but the blunt words, "you were in his arms," tingled through her veins,

"Go," said she, "and see whether my father is stirring yet; and if he be, say that I attend his pleasure to wait upon him."

Helen, while she attired herself, (having purposely dispensed with the usual offices of Bridget,) ran through, in silent meditation, all the appalling circumstances of her visit to Margery Ashwell. The horrors of the incantation, made her blood freeze, as she recalled them. But the answers of Alascon!—and above all, the visions of the glass! She recollected the words of Fitz-Maurice during his interview with her the day before. "Let the tide of time roll on. When it bears, upon its surface, the rare creature who shall unchain me from my mysterious destiny, then shall my invocation be heard." And

again: "I could end my melancholy tale, with a prayer, even to thee, fair one, so strange, yet so earnest, withal, that horror and amazement should be at war within you, as wonder is now." These were his expressions. In the enchanted mirror, she had beheld Fitz-Maurice, kneeling in the attitude of devotion to herself; and next, she was unfastening a ponderous chain, which hung about his neck! Thus, as it would seem, were the prayer he had spoken off, and the unchaining him from his myterious destiny, shadowed forth! And thus, too, it would also seem, she was, herself, incomprehensibly linked with that mysterious destiny, as if *she* were fated to be the "rare creature," whose name, "when all that was now dark should appear in noon-day brightness, he, who *called* himself Fitz-Maurice, would worship, enshrined in his very heart."

There seemed to be an irresistible truth pervading the whole, which terrified her. She reflected upon the strange influence he appeared to exercise over her feelings the first moment she saw and heard him; the deep interest his misfortunes had excited in her bosom; the ardent desire she experienced to alleviate them; the signet; his appearance, when she was setting forth for the cottage of Margery Ashwell; her conveyance back again, as described by Bridget. Every thing proclaimed, as with a supernatural voice, that a resistless decree had trammelled her destiny with that of this mysterious being.

But, while she yielded to these suggestions, the horrible conviction flashed across her mind, that they were derived from circumstances which led to other conclusions, of dreadful import. She had seen her own sepulchre! herself entombed! and she had seen her parricidal hand burying a dagger in her father's heart! "Gracious God!" she involuntarily exclaimed, "and are these things to be!" She covered her face with her hands, and in silent anguish brooded over the dark prophesyings of the spirit. She felt she could not have trust in part, and reject part, as idle fantasy; she must receive all, with a confiding faith, or deny all, with a rebellious one.

A passion of tears came to her relief. "Oh, that the mystic order of these visions," she ejaculated, "might be their real succession, if it be ordained that they shall have reality! Then would my heart be satisfied; for then should

I live to do a deed of goodness, in the redemption of Fitz-Maurice from his fetters, and die, before this guilty hand is stained with the sacred blood of my sire!"

She strove to calm her grief. "I will not believe it," she said, after a pause, and paced up and down her chamber. "All crimes are possible—e'en the foulest—that give the soul to endless perdition; but this is not! Shame upon thee, Helen Lacy! Cry out shame upon thyself, that canst so begrime thyself, though but in ecstasy! Back, back, thou dishonoured tears, that shouldst fall from mine eyes in streams of burning fire, if the fell phantom of imagination which hath op'd their sluices, could become the purpose of thy heart. Why—what a poor distracted fool hast thou made thyself, to coin an ugly monster of the brain, and then fly from it in self-created terror! No! no! I have heard and read, how the dark instruments of mischief, which roam the unknown world, can cozen, with false shows, the inhabitants of this, and clothe in seeming holiness the unrighteous deeds that damn the doer; and I am beleaguered by such, perchance; but I have never, or renounced my God, or denied my Saviour—and my feet shall not fall into their snares."

It was in this conflict of her feelings, that Bridget returned, and informed her of her father's wish to speak with her. She knew not why, but she dreaded the interview; not merely because it would be, for many reasons, an embarrassing one; nor because she was dejected and harassed: but she had a secret apprehension of something that was to add to the already heavy burden of sorrow, which weighed upon her heart. However, she rallied her spirits, and summoning to her aid all the firmness and tranquillity she could command, descended to the apartment of Lacy.



CHAPTER IV.

THE moment she saw her father, she was convinced her pronunciation of trouble was not chimerical. His

countenance betokened anxiety; and, though there was the same affectionate reception which she had ever found, the same tender greeting, and the same warm parental kiss, yet his eye wore a searching, scrutinizing look, as if he would be resolved of some pre-conceived doubt by silent observation, rather than by speech. Helen half shrunk from his gaze; and her gentle spirit smote her as she did so, to think, that for the first time in her life, she feared its meaning.

"Well, my child," said Lacy, (after some time had passed in trivial topics of discourse, which enabled Helen to recover, a little, from her trepidation,) "and what did you think of my little regiment last night? You proved yourself worthy of joining them: for you made De Clare sound a retreat, while you left poor Mortimer dead on the field."

"I am afraid," replied Helen, "that De Clare retreated, not because he was vanquished, but because he was too proud to vanquish; and as for that trim gentleman, whom you call Mortimer, if I killed him, it certainly was not by man-slaughter, nor by knocking out his brains; but, rather, with a lover's death, who expires at his mistress's frown, and lives again, when she smiles."

"Nay," rejoined Lacy; "and you talk of lovers and mistresses, I must say a word in behalf of my friend, Wilfrid Overbury."

"Overbury—Wilfrid Overbury," said Helen; "which of them was he?"

"A square-built yawl, somewhat damaged in the rigging," replied Lacy. "One who looks as if he had robbed a church-yard of half a face, and stolen the worser half; a fellow whose countenance would put the devil out of countenance, and keep deformity in countenance."

"Enough!" exclaimed Helen; "I noted the creature, and wondered where you had found him. He grinned a hideous smile of courtesy at me; but I drew back, lest he should bite. I never beheld, in human form, any thing half so brutish! Whence came he, and what do you call him?"

"Whence he came," said Lacy, "I cannot truly say: and I should be puzzled to give him a name that would designate him for what he is: but let a man ask me what he will be, and I have my answer ready. Fitz-Maurice,

or I greatly misconceive him, holds a lash over this misbegotten whelp of the sea, which will descend yet upon his cur's hide, and make him yell again."

At the mention of Fitz-Maurice's name, Helen felt confused, and she hastily changed the subject of conversation.

"That Peverell," said she, "seems of an open, honest nature; of a shrewd, discerning wit; and has, withal, a most manly bearing. I was pleased with the manner of his narrative, though shocked at the matter of it."

"Ay," replied her father, "but you heard not all. You left the room before he related what he found upon the person of Fortescue."

"I must have done so," said Helen, "for nothing of what you now mention is in my memory. What was it he found?"

"Among other things," answered Lacy, "a purse, containing coin, and a golden signet. The purse we saw, and the coin; but not the golden signet, for Peverell, open as you deem him, had *his* mystery here: and when we pressed for a sight of the signet, he said it had been demanded of him—and he must not be questioned."

Had Lacy been so seated, that he could have seen Helen, he would have beheld her like one, who, walking in fancied security, suddenly finds a yawning gulf beneath his feet; or one who sees a crouching tiger glaring at him, and on the spring. Her breath was stifled: her heart scarcely seemed to pulsate. It had never entered her imagination, that the signet she then wore upon her finger, had belonged to that murdered man. The thought was horrible; and, but that Fitz-Maurice had enjoined her not to remove it, till the sun had thrice and thrice descended to the west, she would instantly have disencumbered herself of the foul spoil. There was another reason, too, why this discovery at once amazed and distressed her; but she dared not give utterance to her feelings. Fortunately, her father did not pause for any reply, but continued talking.

"For my own part," said he, "I confess I was the more curious, touching this signet, because of the extraordinary history that belonged to a crystal cross, suspended from a golden chain, or carkanet, which Peverell also took from the person of Fortescue. He wore it round his neck."

Lacy then described, as Peverell had done, and as he himself had witnessed, the mysterious circumstances connected with this cross; observing, in conclusion, that it was a most rare jewel, merely as a thing of beauty, to look upon. And, do you know," he continued, "if it had not been for the mystic scroll within, and the manner of its being found, I could have persuaded myself, when it was in my hand, that I held the very cross and chain which were my wedding gift to your dear mother, and which she, on her death bed, did bequeath to you; so like it was to that."

"The sight of it, then, must have surprised you much," replied Helen, with great emotion; "for I have heard you say, you had it of an Italian artist, who raised his price upon you, because, (as he affirmed) there was not such another piece of crystal extant, save its fellow, which was in the rich cabinet of the King of Sicily."

"It did surprise me," replied Lacy, and the more, for that, or my eyes were cheated, I discovered, in one corner, a secret mark, made by myself, when first I purchased it, as a note to swear by, if ever it were purloined. I have often thought to make you acquainted with this same token, for similar security; and I will do so now, lest I should never do it. Is it about you?"

"No," answered Helen; "I wear it but seldom."

"Fetch it, then, my child," said Lacy; "it is worth the trouble; and I may not again remember me of my intention."

"Another time," replied Helen: "I will not forget to ask you, when next I have it on."

"Nay, nay: let it be now," continued Lacy, "besides, I can then better explain to you how the scroll showed itself in that which was Fortescue's."

"I have it not!" exclaimed Helen, with a firm dignity of voice and manner.

"How!" replied Lacy, "you have it not?"

"That which was Fortescue's I do believe was mine," added Helen, calmly.

"Yours!" interrupted Lacy, "yours—your mother's—my bridal remembrance to her? Impossible!"

"Most possible—most true," rejoined Helen: "though how and wherefore, and, more than all, how impressed with those words you mention, are to me, as to you, a mystery. Ah! do not look upon me thus! There is no

taint in this business: believe it, I do beseech you! Oh, that my mother could speak from her grave! In her words should I be justified. Even as I have done, so would she: for she loved you with tenfold my love; and yet she could give you no more than I do—a whole and perfect heart!”

“My child!” exclaimed Lacy, “why do you wrong me by an exculpation I demand not? I am not your accuser: though what you utter, perplexes me greatly. Yes, my Helen! Till now—till this moment—I could say, there passed no thought through your mind, there was no action of your life, which I might not know. But I waive a father’s privilege, because I have more than a father’s confidence in all the noble qualities of your nature. Yet answer me this. Had you ever spoken to Fortescue?”

“Never!” replied Helen.

“Nor seen him?” continued Lacy.

“Nor ever saw him—alive——”

“What!” exclaimed her father, “saw you him when dead?”

“Yes.”

“Where?” said Lacy.

“Where Peverell saw him,” rejoined Helen.

“And your cross——”

“And my cross—my crystal cross, and chain of gold, then hung round his bleeding neck!” replied Helen, in a voice scarcely articulate.

“Can you, by no surmise, explain——”

“I can surmise,” interrupted Helen, “but not explain. Yet, what my surmises are, it would be terrible to drag from me now. I am called to an arduous trial: one, it may be, beyond my strength to bear, but not beyond my daring to attempt. If you can still believe your Helen the creature of purity and honour you have ever found her, be steadfast in your belief, yet a little while, and I shall cast off the cloud that now hides me from you. Mine is no mystery, for the sake of mystery. I have played a desperate game, and played it boldly; for it is a mighty stake which I have set upon the hazard of the die.”

“I do fear,” said Lacy, “a stake beyond the value of the prize you throw for.”

“Oh, no!” she exclaimed, seizing her father’s hand, and kissing it fervently. “All I have ventured—all I

have to venture—weighed against that for which I venture, would be but as an atom of the vilest dust in the one scale, and, in the other, the treasures of the Indies!”

“Well,” replied Lacy, folding her tenderly in his arms, “I cannot surround you with an old man’s experience, for I know not the advice that would adapt itself to your necessities, not knowing your necessities. It would cost me but little, to give the child of my affection that confidence I have already yielded to a stranger, were it not, that in the latter it was mine own ease only I played with, while in the former, ’tis your life, perhaps, I risk. However, it is done. I gave a soldier’s honour last night to Fitz-Maurice—I give a father’s willing promise now to thee. Only have a care you do not break my heart!”

Helen wept in silence. As soon as she could speak, she inquired if she might be permitted to know what enterprise he was bound by the honour he had pledged to Fitz-Maurice; and Lacy related all that had taken place after she retired to her own chamber.

While they were thus engaged in conversation, Peverell was announced; and he had scarcely seated himself, ere he communicated the death of Clayton. It appeared, that in the course of the preceding evening, an ominous change had taken place; and that at midnight all hope was destroyed, by the sudden breaking out of fetid sores over his whole body, which rapidly spread into one mass of ulcerous corruption.

“I saw him this morning,” said Peverell, “and was shocked at his appearance. It was as if a fierce fire had blistered him from head to foot, and so disfigured his face, that not a feature could be distinguished which recalled what he was when living. Poor Clayton! I have lost a friend of many years—a fast friend in adversity, and a firm one in peril! He was one of those few men who pass for less than they are worth in this world. He did not wear his heart upon his sleeve, nor his good intentions upon his lips. His virtues were like our country’s manners—somewhat of the homeliest, perhaps, in their outward show, but of the true mettle beneath. There are many to whom I give the hand, and who call themselves my friends, as often as they speak of me, whom I should have less missed than Clayton, for to him I gave my heart.”

Peverell dashed away a tear as he bore this tribute to the worth of Clayton.

"I knew him but little," observed Lacy; "and only discovered in him a simple honesty of speech, and a modesty of carriage which won first opinions in his favour. How does his widow sustain her grief?"

"Why, faith," replied Peverell, "with a very exemplary and becoming resignation. I found her, with her handkerchief ready for tears that were not ready; and consoling herself with the reflection, that, as there were no children, the little her good man had saved would keep her comfortably enough. I know not how it is, but women, when they marry, seem to have an easy way of calculating their expected sum of future happiness. It is, to make the most of their husbands, while living, and the most *by* them, when dead."

"Out upon you!" exclaimed Helen. "You rail thus saucily against us, because you have been passed by in the great traffic for husbands, as not worth the cheapening; or e'en the having at any price."

"That I have stood in the market thus long, and found no one to bid for me," replied Peverell, smiling, "is an event which, I am unable to say, whether it should be accounted my good fortune or my bad."

"Your bad, certainly," said Lacy. "A man who passes through life without marrying, is like a fair mansion left by the builder unfinished. The half that is completed runs to decay from neglect, or becomes, at best, but a sorry tenement, wanting the addition of that which makes the whole useful. Your bachelor is only the moiety of a man; a sort of garnish for a dish—or a prologue to a play—a bow—without the fiddle. A wife is the other moiety and the better; she is the dish, the play, the fiddle——"

"Which sometimes uttereth most discordant sounds," interrupted Peverell; "as a good prologue may introduce a bad play, or a savoury garnish be the recommendation to a most unsavoury dish."

"Spleen, mere spleen! Master Peverell," said Lacy, "and to be forgiven only out of pity to thy ignorance. He who has tasted double ale, may speak in praise of single ale, if he like; but he who has never drunk double ale, must not expect to find his word omnipotent in behalf of single ale."

"How, if a man always see the drinkers of double ale, quarrelsome, or moping, or care-oppressed, melancholy or choleric," said Peverell, "while he who drains his cup of single ale, is ever blithe, contented, peaceful, and the very soul of good fellowship? Shall he not hence infer, with just cause, as to the qualities of the two liquors?"

"No," said Helen, smiling; "he shall infer, with far more just cause, as to the qualities of the drinkers, who, in the disguise of their potations, are themselves undisguised."

"I am at perilous odds in this contest, I perceive," replied Peverell, "and may as well give it up."

The door suddenly opened at this moment, and Owen Rees entered, as if a leash of blood-hounds had him in chase, and were close at his heels.

"Who saw the Abbey last night?" he exclaimed.

"Not I," replied Peverell.

"Nor I," said Lacy.

"Then I did," continued Owen; "and I would you had both been there—mark me, for my description shall do no justice to the bare truth of what I saw."

"What was it?" inquired Peverell.

"What!" exclaimed Owen—"you shall hear. It was at the old hour—twelve o'clock—I was walking home to my night-cap, thinking of Fitz-Maurice, and the next four days, and that ketch, that tar barrel, 'the master of the Scorpion'—and of Fortescue, and the chain and the cross, and all the mysteries, miracles, enchantments, and wonders, mark you, that we had been talking about, when, boom! went the bell—and crash! crash! crash! whiz! whiz! rattle and roar! went something else. I turned round, and, God preserve me! I was not frightened—no, no, there is not a part about me that cries coward, let danger show itself how it may—but if ever I thought myself in a fright, it was at that moment, mark you! I can tell you it was a fearful sight, to come upon one unawares, and in the dark, for the moon just then—but no matter for that—I can stand to a lion,—though a man who would pluck Barbarossa by the beard, and cry, *take the fig!* may yet tremble, when he sees old Beelzebub himself."

"As you did last night," said Lacy, "though thou art too shamefast to confess as much."

"By the soul of Cadwallader I did shake!" replied

Owen, "when I saw what I saw;—which, mark me, was nothing less than a company of fiery columns, dancing a bergomask upon the roof of the Abbey."

"What mean you?" said Peverell.

"I mean what I say," quoth the Welchman; "and meaning enough, too, I warrant. I tell you, there were twelve pillars of fire—for I counted them—in and out, up and down, backwards and forwards, like so many devils with flame-coloured jerkins, in reeling motions on the Abbey! and when the bell had done tolling, it was crash! crash! crash! again—whiz! whiz! rattle and roar! and away they went!"

"And you beheld this with your own eyes?" observed Peverell.

"As veritably as I now tell you with my own tongue," rejoined Rees.

"You are sure you were not in bed, and had a dream?" continued Peverell, with a well assumed gravity.

"If I were," answered Owen, earnestly, "it must have been a dream of two hours long, mark you; and, moreover, I must have dreamed afterwards, that I went home, and could not go to sleep, for thinking of my dream, till the third hour of the morning."

Helen dared not, or she could have confirmed so much of Owen Rees' story, as related to the fact of a body of fire, shaped like a pillar or column, being visible, when the clock struck twelve; but whether there were as many pillars as hours, must still have rested upon his single authority. She remembered what she had herself seen, just as she arrived at the door of Margery Ashwell's cottage.

Neither Peverell nor Lacy, indeed, had any real doubts upon the subject, though they sported a little with honest Owen's half-revealed fears. Such signs and appearances were consistent, not only with what had already occurred, but with what they might expect to occur, after the declarations of Fitz-Maurice; and the tenor of their discourse, soon convinced the Welchman of this, when they began to discuss with him the probable signification of what he had witnessed. Peverell was of opinion, they could only regard it as a part of the great mystery which was now to be so soon solved, and akin to that which was first seen by himself and Clayton; repeated, perhaps, though under a different form, to prick them on in the

work they had begun, and to make manifest to them that it must be finished.

"Have you," said Lacy, addressing Peverell, (and at the same time directing a look towards Helen, which she at once comprehended, as meant to allay any fears his question might awaken,) "have you, at this moment, the crystal cross, which you found upon the person of Fortescue? My daughter was not present when you produced it last night; and after what I have been telling her, it would gratify her curiosity to see it."

"Yes," replied Peverell; "here it is; I have not allowed it to pass from my possession for an instant."

Lacy received it from Peverell, and holding it up to the light, said, "Ay, there are the marvellous words."

He gave it to Helen, pressing her hand gently at the time, and significantly observing, "Do not be afraid; you will only see something which you have *not* seen before."

Helen took the cross, and examined it, as if in admiration of the workmanship. *It was her own!* Not a doubt remained upon her mind. She held it to the light, and after looking through the transparent jewel for nearly a minute, returned it to her father, saying, "*I see nothing which I have not seen before.*"

"How!" exclaimed Peverell, "nothing which you have not seen before!"

"No, replied Helen, "I have seen such an ornament as this, ere now; and, as for the liquid scroll you speak of, strange as it may seem to you, my eyes perceive it not."

It was as she stated; for when *she* held it up to the light, the words were not visible: but when held up by Lacy, Peverell, and Owen Rees, they were as distinctly perceptible as they had ever been.

"You must be mistaken," said her father; "here is the scroll; and, if any thing, *more* apparent, (at least, so it seems to my sight,) than it was last night. Look again," he continued, "and go nearer to the window."

Helen obeyed, and once more held up the cross. She started.

"Ay—now you see it," said Lacy.

"Yes—yes," exclaimed Helen, with a trembling voice, "now I see"—and she paused.

"The words I repeated to you this morning," continued her father: "is it not so?"

"You said right," added Helen, with increasing agitation, and returning the cross to her father; "*I have seen something which I never saw before.*"

Helen had cause to feel amazed; for, as she looked the second time, she beheld these words, glittering before her eyes, as if formed of minute diamonds:

**When next the signet is obey'd,
'Twill be the cross of Christ to add;
When thrice the signet is obey'd,
The cross of Christ is thine, fair maid.**

Lacy, Peverell, and Owen Rees, observed the agitation of Helen, but ascribed it to the astonishment which would naturally be excited by the liquid scroll. Helen herself felt her heart fainting under these thickening mysteries; and almost immediately left the room, lest her emotions should become so violent as to create the suspicion that something more than what was deemed their cause, had produced them.

When she had retired, Lacy, addressing Peverell, reminded him of what had passed between them the preceding night, when he first saw the cross. "I told you," said he, "or, if I did not, you might have told, from my manner, that I had a special interest, distinct from the general one, in knowing the particulars of your finding it: and so I had. The thoughts that then possessed me, have since been satisfied; and when the time comes for all these things to be laid bare, you will confess that my individual portion of the one great mystery, as appertaining to this cross, will bear comparison with any that shall then be solved."

"Perhaps," said Peverell, somewhat significantly, (for a rising suspicion began to dawn upon his mind,) "perhaps, *my* mystery of the signet, and *yours* of the cross, may have an unlooked-for affinity.

"Very likely," replied Lacy: "but now, to speak as a soldier should, what is to be the next operation of our campaign? Watch we to-night? And what farther tidings have you of Fitz-Maurice?"

"I have no farther tidings of Fitz-Maurice," replied

Peverell, "and I know nothing of our future operations, save that my voice will certainly be for re-commencing them this night."

"And mine, too," added Owen Rees. "As for Fitz-Maurice, it were a pity an' he came not, do you mark; for our 'Master of the Scorpion,' may be impatient for that farther satisfaction he promised him."

It was ultimately resolved that they should all meet at eight o'clock in the evening, at Lacy's; he engaging to make the requisite communications to the others, and Peverell promising to acquaint his worship therewith, that meet preparations might be attended to in the Abbey.

Helen had retired to her chamber, overwhelmed with fresh anxiety. The disclosure, by her father, of the discovery of the signet: his knowledge that it was her cross which had been found upon Fortescue; and, above all, the double miracle of its mystic words, agitated her with distracting thoughts.

"I was not deceived," she exclaimed, "when, as I paused for a moment, to gaze with horror upon that murdered man, I recognised the much-valued jewel: of so dear a value, that when the hag commanded I should leave it behind (*for with that implement she should work to procure me the satisfaction I desired,*) my tears fell fast while I unclasped it from my neck; as if foreboding, that when next I saw it, it would be an affliction to my heart. Alas! it was so! though, till an hour ago, the hope clung to me that mine eyes were cheated."

It was in vain she bewildered herself with conjectures, as to how it could have been conveyed to where Peverell found it, or how it had received that two-fold impress; first, of the words read by her father and the rest, and then, on the instant, of those which were visible to herself alone. What, too, was their meaning? She longed for the moment when she should again converse with Fitz-Maurice. He alone could explain it; he alone could explain also, the dark, ambiguous answers of the spirit Alascon; and he alone could tell what had befallen her, from the time when she sunk lifeless on the ground in Margery's cottage, till she found herself supported by him on the terrace. Thus, more and more, and at every step she took, all her most anxious hopes, all her most appalling fears, all that concerned her present happiness and

future welfare, was bound up in the agency of that being. She felt as though she could not move but as his genius, evil or good, directed her; and she felt, at the same time, as if she could not resist his mysterious influence, whithersoever it might lead her.



CHAPTER V.

PEVERELL, when he left Lacy's, proceeded at once to the mayor's house; but on his way thither, he was overtaken by a crowd of persons who were moving tumultuously along. His curiosity was excited, and he inquired what had happened. He was informed they had a thief in custody, and were conveying him to be examined before his worship. Peverell worked his way into the middle of the crowd, and beheld a tall, athletic, gipsy-looking youth, in the gripe of two constables; while, to his great surprise, he saw mine host following close behind, with a loaf of bread under his arm, which, it seemed, the culprit had stolen. The appearance of the delinquent, was such as attracted Peverell's attention. His make was muscular, his step firm, and his stature erect. His countenance was swarthy, and overhung with raven locks, which descended in natural curls down the sides of his face. His eye was large, dark, and piercing, full of gloomy purpose, and sullen desperation. On his upper lip he wore large mustaches. There was a pleasing expression of benignity about his mouth; and his teeth were regular, and of exquisite whiteness. His dress was tattered, and bespoke poverty: but his mien and gesture were such as commanded respect. Even the rude rabble who were gathered round him, and who are always ready to insult and deride him whom the fangs of justice have caught, even they looked on with silence.

As the crowd moved slowly forward, various were the conjectures which were hazarded. Some thought he was the murderer of the man whose body could not be found—some wondered whether he was a wandering knight in

disguise; while others gravely hinted he might be a magician—and now they had caught him, perhaps there would be no more coil in the Abbey.

“But he has stolen a loaf of bread,” said one, “and if he were a magician, he need not steal bread, for he could make it out of a buff jerkin, if he liked; or conjure all the bread in the town into his pocket, and walk away with it.”

“Marry might he,” exclaimed another, “as I lost a sucking pig last week, which an old witch, who was passing by, conjured away.”

“Ah, ah,” interrogated a gray-headed man, who was hobbling along upon a crutch, “and how did you know she was a witch? Didst see her mount in a sieve?”

“No, I didn’t,” replied the first; “but I saw you just after, so, mayhap, you stole it.”

This retort created a laugh at the expense of the old man, who did not hobble quite so fast, and the crowd soon left him behind. When he was out of hearing, the one who had been bereaved of his sucking pig, observed significantly, that “he was certain she was a witch, for her nose and chin met, her eyes were as red as a ferret’s, and she talked to herself.”

Peverell, mean while, had fallen into conversation with mine host, and learned from him the particulars of the theft.

“There is something very singular and striking in his appearance,” said Peverell.

“He seems above his condition,” replied Wintour; “and I own it is more from curiosity to know farther respecting him, than from any desire to see him in the stocks for this loaf, that I have pursued the matter.”

They had now arrived at the house of his worship, and Peverell took the opportunity of speaking with him before he was engaged in examining the culprit. He promptly undertook to do the same, as he had hitherto done; but shook his head mysteriously, and whispered in Peverell’s ear that “he had not heard from her Majesty’s council yet. Peverell replied, “he had no doubt he would soon be summoned to appear before it; but, meanwhile, they would resume their watchings, and, perhaps, they might thus be enabled to arm him with some strong facts against he went to London.” He then informed him of the persons who were waiting without, to bring a culprit before

his worship, and mentioned what appeared to be the remarkable quality of the accused youth.

"I'll find his quality out, I warrant," said his worship, "as you shall see; an' you have time to wait the examination."

Peverell readily consented, and accompanied his worship into the room, where he usually gave audiences on occasions of this kind. Being seated in his chair of state, with his clerk beside him, he immediately proceeded to business, by inquiring what was the nature of the charge against the prisoner.

"An' it please your worship's reverence," said one of the constables, "this vagrom is a thief."

"Oho! a thief!" rejoined his worship. "What has he stolen, and who is the accuser?"

Mine host now stepped forth, and briefly stated that the culprit, after walking several times to and fro, opposite his door, which, as his worship knew, was the sign of *The Rose*—"

"Yes, Master Wintour," interrupted the mayor, "I do know; and, moreover, I know that a mug of as good ale may be had *under The Rose* as can be drunk in all St. Albans; but proceed."

Mine host thanked his worship for his good word, and went on.

"He walked several times up and down, as I said, when anon, though he saw me on a bench near, he snatched up this loaf from a table, and ran off with it. I ran after him, raised a hue and cry, and soon brought him back; but while I was asking him a few questions, he watched his opportunity, and darted off again, with the loaf, like a greyhound. We followed, and a devil of a chase (saving your worship's presence) he led us—over hedges and ditches, up hill and down dale, before we could catch him. At last he ran into a lane that had no thoroughfare, and then we secured him; and now here he is, to answer for himself."

"Ay, ay," said his worship, "I see how it is; he wanted his dinner, and was too lazy to work for it; but we'll give him a dinner and a supper, too, I warrant." Then, turning to the prisoner, "Thou naughty varlet," he continued, "what have you to say?"

The culprit, who had remained unmoved during the

whole of mine host's deposition, looking with a steady glance, first at his accuser and then at the mayor, now came forward with a deliberate step, and, in answer to his worship's question, simply pronounced the word, "Nothing," in a hollow, but manly voice.

"You have nothing to say, eh?" said his worship.

"Nothing!" replied the prisoner, in the same tone.

"And do you know that you will be whipped, set in the stocks, and sent to prison?"

"Yes!"

"What is your name?" inquired the clerk.

"I have no name: I lost it when I forfeited my honesty."

"What are you?" said his worship.

"A man!"

"What craft?"

"None."

"How do you live?"

"Like the rest of the world—as well as I can."

"Where do you live?"

"Here, now—to-morrow, any where!"

"Really," exclaimed his worship, waxing a little wrathful at what he considered the saucy bluntness of his answers; "really, you are a very pretty rascal. Perhaps you expect to get off by this device; but you will find out your mistake."

"I expect you will do your duty," replied the culprit; "and then, I suppose, I shall be imprisoned, whipped, and set in the stocks."

"I undertake to promise you all three," rejoined his worship; "but first, I would fain know a little more of you. I am fond of original characters; and you seem to be one. What made you steal this man's bread?"

"Want!"

"Ay, ay, that is always the ready plea—but if you were in want, why not work, and eat honest bread?"

"Who will employ me? No one! The world's doors are shut against me!"

"Why did you not eat the loaf, when you purloined it, if you wanted it?"

"There are wants of the soul," replied the youth, "as well as of the body; *mine* were the former."

"Come, come," quoth his worship, "this is trifling

with the respect due to mine office: I insist upon knowing your name, that the clerk may enter it in the deposition. What is your name, sirrah?"

"George Wilson. Have you aught more with me?"

"Oh!" exclaimed his worship, in a tone of irony, "what, you have a name, have you, when you are put to it? I dare be sworn you have an *alias* too. George Wilson, *alias* what?"

"I have answered you," replied the prisoner, calmly, but proudly. "What farther questions?"

"None," said his worship. "You may take him to prison."

The constables were about to remove him, when he put them aside with a deliberate air, and addressed his worship.

"Having answered all your questions, now hear *me*. I have been brought before you as an offender against the laws. You are appointed to maintain and enforce those laws. My offence is small, and, I hope, justifiable in the sight of Heaven!" and he raised his eyes, streaming with tears. "God knows from what motives I have acted! They were solemn ones." His voice faltered a little; but soon recovered its wonted firmness.

"It was your duty," he continued, "to take the depositions of my accuser, and to act upon them according to law. But who gave you power, who gave you a right, to insult me with needless questions, to oppress me with mean insinuations, to wound me with your puny wit? The consciousness of that protection which your station throws around you, should have made you merciful. I incensed you by no insolence of manner, by no turbulence of conduct. I bore your taunts with mildness. Surely, it would become you to distinguish between the hardened sinner and the lowly one: between the perpetrator of great misdeeds, and the offender in trifling ones.

"What is the amount of my crime? I attempted to despoil this man of a loaf of bread. I had no money; I had no friends; I had no home: but I had—God of heaven, hear and forgive me!—I had a father!—an aged, helpless, blind, and dying father, calling aloud for food, and no raven of the desert to bring it him. Poor old man! I would have plucked the morsel from a hungry bear to have given thee, rather than have longer heard

thy feeble wailings for want, rather than still have beheld thy sightless eyeballs, rolling in their sockets, and turned towards heaven to implore its pitying help!

“What had I to fear from man? From man, who is my brother—from man, whose heart should feel for misery! Three long days and three miserable nights has my father fasted; during that time has he pined, inch-meal, away; in that time has he drunk nothing but the water of the stagnant pool; in that time has he cursed his existence; during all that time has he groaned beneath the bony grasp of death! Stretched on the bare earth, with no shelter from the inclement skies, but what the embowering trees could give him—no pillow for his head but the green turf—no covering for his wasting body but his tattered clothes—there he lies, dark, dark, and famished.

“I have shared his hunger: I have shared his watching. I have set by him, and longed to hear his last sigh! Every moment I expected it, and I would not leave him. His cries for food I evaded, believing death at hand. I shuddered at the thought of lengthening a wretched life a few sad hours! I sat in gloomy desperation, hoping to see him expire! Ay! look on me with horror;—I panted, I thirsted to behold that wasted form stretched in the arms of death: for what is *life* to the blind, the aged, the needy, and the ailing? Who that is thus bowed down with the infirmities of nature, and oppressed by the tyranny of man, would arrest the silent strides of death? Abhor the savage of the desert and the forest, who leaves his aged parent to perish—he is more merciful than we, who shut out the grave, even when we are shut out from the world, and the world’s delights!

“Fixed was my gloomy purpose, and I sat in horrid silence, by my father, heaving in the throes of death. With the green mantle of the standing pool, I wetted his lips, as often as he called for drink; when he moaned for food, I was silent as the mole; he knew not that I was near him. Heart-rending was my task, and dreadfully I fulfilled it. When the darkness of night encompassed the creation, when all was stillness and solemn gloom, then have I sat impatiently listening to my father as he gasped for life! The fever’s fiery fang had unstrung his joints, and he could not move: still, as he called for drink, I was at hand; but, when he bade me feed him, I an-

swered not. Vain hope! Each morning's dawn showed him to me, still living, but still dying!

"The length of my trial subdued my resolution. The energy which despair and misery had lent me, was weakened; the iron purpose of my heart gave way; and when I saw my father lingering on in the pangs of death, yet struggling to live; when I viewed his emaciated form, still triumphing over hunger and the fever's rage; when I beheld him gnawing the very earth on which he lay, to satisfy the ravenous cravings of his famished stomach, my soul yearned with pity; and I left him this morning, with the desperate resolve of procuring food for him, at whatever hazard. Filled with this resolution, I passed your door; I repassed it—I hoped to interest your compassion by my looks; but you had no commerce with pity. I then seized the loaf and fled: not hastily, or I might have escaped. I was brought back. An agonizing thought of my poor father's condition came across my mind. I rushed forth again, pursued by you and others. I was deceived in that lane—I thought it led to where my father lay; if it had, and I could have dropped the bread by his side, I would have turned upon you, and delivered up myself without a struggle. But, it was otherwise ordained!—and now, glut your revenge: here I am, a poor, forsaken, wretched, persecuted outcast. You know my crime: you have it recorded. I would have robbed this man; but let it be recorded also, I would have robbed *him*, to feed a dying parent! Perhaps, by this time, he is dead: Heaven grant it may be so! I am your prisoner. Only let me know my father's spirit is released, that it is in another world, and you may command this carcass of mine to what part of this world it may please you to send it."

Here he paused, and never did an oration of Demosthenes or Cicero produce an equal effect. After a silence of some minutes, which was more expressive than any language could have been, mine host, in a stammering voice, addressed his worship, observing, "that as we were all Christians alike, he thought, for his part, we ought to behave like Christians one to another; and though he might not choose to have his bread taken away, by any Jack that had a fancy to purloin it, yet, could he have known at the time, what he knew then, all the bread in his house, and all the meat in his larder;—yea, and all the ale in his cel-

lar—might have kept company with that loaf, if they could have carried comfort with them to the poor creature who had pined with hunger for three days and nights.”

His worship, who, when the dignity of office did not interfere, had a really kind and compassionate heart in his bosom, looked at mine host as he spoke, with a glistening eye, for he divined his meaning, and secretly lauded it. It was not for him, however, sitting in the chair of justice, and sworn to administer it impartially, to propound an escape to the prisoner; but, he very significantly pointed out how it might be done, while gravely deprecating such a course. Peverell comprehended his humane intention; and, by a timely hint to mine host, enabled him to withdraw the charge, which he instantly did, to the infinite satisfaction of all present.

“I am free to depart, then?” said the youth.

“You are,” replied his worship.

“Then let me begone,” he continued; “every moment is precious, and I should ill deserve the liberty I have regained, were I to waste in sloth, nor fulfil the purpose of my absence.”

Peverell and mine host proposed to accompany him to the spot where he had left his father, and the mayor’s kitchen supplied him with viands and a flagon of cordial, which Crab, who had heard the whole proceeding, placed under the youth’s arm, with an honest “God bless you!” as he left the house.



CHAPTER VI.

THERE were many persons assembled round the door, waiting to know the issue of the examination; and when their curiosity was satisfied by the constables, who communicated all the particulars after their own fashion, and with such figures of oratory as became them, every one was as eager to befriend and pity, as they had before been to deride and insult.

They had proceeded about a mile and a half beyond the

town, and were crossing a field which bordered on the main road, when the youth suddenly darted forward with a loud shriek, and rushed towards something which was lying on the ground, a few yards distant.

"Oh God!" he exclaimed, with a convulsive sob; "my father!"

He stood motionless; not another word escaped, not a groan, nor even a sigh. His father lay dead before him, and exhibited the most piteous spectacle of want, misery, and age, that ever smote the heart of man.

His arms and legs a child might have spanned. He was lying on his back, a mid-day sun gleaming on his pallid cheeks, while a raven, which alighted on his forehead, was scared from its horrid repast of picking the sightless eye-ball from its socket! Dreadful as this scene was, it was yet heightened by other circumstances; and among them, by the lacerated state of the old man's face and hands; from which it was evident he had crawled through the opposite hedge, the thorns of which had mangled the little flesh that disease and famine had left upon his bones. In the last agonies of death, finding himself deserted, nature had rallied all her energies, and he had crawled, or, rather, dragged himself, darkling, along the ground, with the expiring hope of obtaining aid and pity. Vain hope! Nature let her power but a moment, then resumed it, and all was over! The shattered tenement lay an unsightly ruin on the earth, while its nobler inhabitant had taken its flight to other regions, whose awful veil no mortal can uplift.

The gipsy youth stood with his hands clasped across his bosom, (the very image of meek and pious sorrow,) the tear rolling down his cheeks, and terror, anguish, and despair written on every lineament of his face. He gave no other vent to his grief; but, as he contemplated his lifeless sire, and bethought him of his own inexorable purpose, remorse and pity, joy and sadness, seemed to rack his mind with contending emotions; and Peverell, who was by his side, fancied he heard him faintly exclaim, "Murderer!" through his half unclosed lips. It was, doubtless a self accusation, wrung from the recollection of the motives which had actuated him for three long nights and days.

Mine host now entreated him to retire from the dis-

trekking spectacle, and arousing himself from his torpor, he leaned upon the arm of Wintour, and walked a few paces from the body. Peverell endeavoured to sooth his afflicted feelings, and his mild and tender manner had the desired effect. He knew the wants of a mourning heart too well, to interrupt it in those gentle sorrows, which, as they flow forth, ease it of its pangs. He led him from the spot; and as they returned to the town, (mine host having undertaken to see that the body should be properly conveyed after,) he engaged him in such conversation as was most likely to blunt the poignancy of his grief.

To do good by halves, was no part of Peverell's character; and he resolved, if possible, to befriend this youth, should he himself interpose no obstacles. If a fellow mortal happened to fall down in the road of life, Peverell was not one who would be satisfied with merely helping him up: he lent him his arm, and assisted him on his journey. There is an art in making men happy, which very few understand. It is not always by putting the hand into the pocket, that we remove affliction. There must be something more; there must be advice, and labour, and activity; we must bestir ourselves, leave our arm-chair, throw off our slippers, and go abroad, if we would effectually serve our fellow creatures. We must give our time, our tongue, and our presence, as well as our money. We must comfort them in their sorrows, counsel them in their affairs, stand between them and oppression; intercede, where intercession is needful; persuade, where persuasion can be of avail, and lend them the authority of our countenance. The doing of all this, revives that spring of action which misfortune is so apt to enfeeble, and without which, no man can permanently prosper; it creates, in the objects of our bounty, that confidence and emulation, which produce the happiest consequences. When, to this active and effectual benevolence, the more prompt efficacy of money is added, how great and how lasting, may not the good be! Few, however, possess this quality of philanthropy; for it costs *less* to give a guinea, than to give an hour.

"You are without a home, without a friend, and without money," said Peverell, as they walked along; "let me supply you with all."

"I am, indeed, friendless, homeless, penniless," re-

plied the youth; "yet I cannot accept your generous offer. *My* resting place, if ever I tread it again, is across the wide waste of waters."

Peverell forbore to urge questions which evidently disturbed him. It was necessary, however, that present shelter and sustenance should be provided, and he suggested that he had better remain at his house for a day or two, at least until the interment of his father's remains.

"No!" said the youth; "let my treatment be, as my condition is. Your poor-house, or whatever other place you have for vagrant wretchedness, will be a fit asylum for me. I will sojourn here till I have seen my father in his grave, and then, with such means as the hand of charity may supply, pursue my pilgrimage to the clime of my birth."

"You are not a countryman, then," said Peverell.

"I am not; and I should have thought my tongue had proclaimed my foreign extraction. I am a Venetian: but the calls of business have frequently conducted me to your shores. A wrong—a base and malignant wrong—done my father and myself, by an Englishman who had constant traffic with our Venetian merchants, brought us hither, some six months since, in pursuit of vengeance! How we were foiled, and by what unlooked for mischances, reduced to the sad condition which made me a parricide in heart, and then a robber, it would madden me to tell. But," he continued, (gnashing his teeth, and with a motion of his clenched hand, as if he felt a dagger in its grasp, and was directing its aim,) "revenge defeated, is not our country's reproach: and wherever the rank villain may now hide his head, I do not despair of taking down his hot blood by our Italian method!"

When Peverell found that the resolution of the youth was inflexible, the only course which he considered open to him, was to conduct him back to the mayor's, it being within his jurisdiction to make such provision for his immediate wants, as he would consent to accept. He accordingly did so; and while there, he was joined by mine host, who took an opportunity, when his worship was conversing with the young Venetian, to draw Peverell aside. It was to communicate to him, that he had discovered, round the neck of the old man, fastened to a piece of silken cord, the miniature he then held in his hand.

He gave it to Peverell. It was the resemblance of a lady, in the bloom of youth and beauty, but whose countenance was overshadowed by a tender air of melancholy which rather heightened than diminished its lustre. Peverell looked at it for some moments, with feelings of admiration, excited no less by the peculiar loveliness of the face, than by the high and exquisite finish bestowed upon it by the artist. He approached the youth, and presented it to him. At the sight of it he started. His countenance exhibited the most violent emotions; and he eagerly thrust it into his bosom. After a pause, he exclaimed, addressing Peverell,

“Oh! if you knew the tender, melancholy story that belongs to this picture, and how the destiny of my departed sire was connected with that image of beauty, you might feebly comprehend what a treasure it is to me. In the midst of my affliction, I had forgotten it; and, but for you, it might have fallen into sordid or vulgar hands, who would have purloined it for its paltry value.”

The offer was renewed, on the part of Peverell, to receive him in his house, and the mayor also pressed him to stay where he was; but, with an inexplicable pertinacity, he adhered to the resolution of being treated as no other than a mendicant or pauper. Whether it was in the bitter spirit of untameable pride, which made him disdain to receive, in his present condition, any thing beyond what that condition could claim from mere humanity; or, that he mingled with his sense of the wrong which one Englishman had done him, a scorn of all; or whether he could not endure the thought of participating, immediately, in comforts and enjoyments which had been denied to his wretched father, in the last hours of his existence—whether, in fact, it was from the influence of any one of these feelings, or from a motive compounded of them all, it was impossible to know; for he was profoundly silent as to his reasons. It was finally settled, however, by his worship, that mine host should provide him with bed and board at the town's expense; and he soon after left, to take up his quarters, once more, at *The Rose*, though under somewhat different circumstances.

CHAPTER VII.

At the appointed time, they were all assembled at Lacy's house, and it was speedily resolved they should proceed to the Abbey by ten o'clock: that hour being proposed by Walwyn, in half jest and half earnest, because they were now reduced to ten in number. When this was suggested, however, Peverell stated that he had been visited, since their last meeting, by two of their townsmen, who were exceedingly desirous of being permitted to join them. They were persons of good repute, and in no respect unfit to become their associates; but they ridiculed the idea of there being any mystery in the business, and seemed thoroughly satisfied that if they could only once be present, they should either instantly detect the imposture, or discover the natural causes of the things that had been bruited about. He had not ventured, upon his own motion, he said, to comply with their wishes; but he promised to do, what he was then doing, mention them; and, if no objections presented themselves, they were to receive a communication from him.

It was doubted at first, whether any increase to their numbers would be approved of by Fitz-Maurice, whom they now recognised as their director, and whose assent or dissent, would regulate their own. But, when it was understood, that in all probability, he would not be with them that night, (no intimation of such intention having been received,) and that, therefore, he could not be consulted; while on the other hand, nothing had ever fallen from him, which distinctly prescribed any particular number, or even any particular description of persons, it was at once determined to admit the applicants. Peverell, accordingly, despatched a messenger, appointing them to be at the Abbey door a few minutes before ten.

"I prophesy they will return more than satisfied," said Mortimer.

"I warrant you," added Owen Rees, "or why, I pray you, the fiery vagaries I saw last night?"

The Welchman being called upon to explain his meaning, related nearly as he had done to Peverell and Lacy, his story of the twelve devils in flame-coloured jerkins.

De Clare laughed aloud.

"You may laugh," said Owen, "but I can count, mark you; and I am a calf, if there were not twelve."

"Hours, do you mean?" replied De Clare.

"No," said Owen, with a vehement spluttering; "twelve fires of pillar, bobbing about in the roof upon the air of the Abbey: twelve fires of pillar, mark you."

"I did mark," answered De Clare; "and as I am a man, and no calf, there was only one! I grant you, that one waved and flickered, and bellied itself into a seeming many: but it was still one—only one, Master Owen."

"Did *you* see it?" inquired Rees.

"I did," said De Clare.

"Oh," quoth Owen, "then I'll not be pertinacious, mark you; and more particularly since you allow that it looked a many."

"I saw it too," said Overbury, "for I have slept more soundly in howling tempests, rocked upon the mountain billows, than I could last night in my bed. As I stood at my window, and read what weather we should have, by the rack of the clouds, I beheld this thing you talk of; and I wished I had been in the Abbey to give an account of any doings that might be going on."

Peverell interrupted this conversation, by mentioning the death of Clayton, and relating the adventure of the Venetian youth. The former was so generally expected, that ~~it~~ excited little surprise, though the ordinary expressions of regret were not omitted on the occasion: but the latter produced much inquiry and conjecture. Mine host stated that he remained at his house, still preserving an unbroken silence, (except brief replies to any questions that were put to him,) and scarcely partaking of the food or drink that was spread before him.

Their discourse now wandered to other subjects; but there was evidently a common reluctance to converse upon the object of their meeting, as they had hitherto done. Every allusion to it, was either studiously avoided, or quickly abandoned. In truth, their situation had undergone a great change. Heretofore, they were in the condition of men, who had spontaneously engaged in an in-

vestigation which they felt themselves free, at any stage of it, to renounce or continue. They might treat it gravely, or otherwise, as it suited their several humours; while each was at liberty to terminate his own individual attendance, if it so pleased him.

But this was no longer their condition. They had merged their separate rights, in one general obligation. They had bound themselves by the solemnity of an oath, and what was equally strong, by reciprocal pledges, come what might, to have four more watchings. Perhaps, it was the consciousness of this compact, (which assumed something of the character of necessity,) that diminished their alacrity and zeal; or, perhaps, each of them gloomily anticipated, (though no one confessed as much,) some disastrous consequence to himself. Certain it is, there was a dull and cheerless tone in their conversation this night, which had never prevailed before.

It might, indeed, be partly explained by the individual anxieties which had arisen. Lacy, for instance, was troubled about Helen, and felt uneasy under the mystery of her cross; Peverell was depressed in consequence of the death of Clayton; Overbury groaned in apprehension of Fitz-Maurice: De Clare wore his self-imposed fetters impatiently; and Owen Rees had not got over the qualms produced by his twelve dancing devils. Even Mortimer had had a personal quarrel with himself that day, and was out of humour; for he had discovered a carbuncle on his nose, which three hours of patient bathing with an infallible lotion had not removed. As to Vehan, he was at any time but a foggy companion; and this night, his melancholy visage might have scared laughter from the dimpled cheeks of a school boy, home-going for the holidays.

With such elements for drowsy fellowship, (mine host never rising to the level of familiarity,) it was no wonder that Walwyn grew reserved, or that Hungerford Hoskyns could not rally himself into his usual vein of careless, random talk. He made one or two attempts; but met with such a chilling reception, that his tongue seemed to freeze in his mouth.

At length the time arrived for them to repair to the Abbey.

"Shall we go?" said De Clare.

"I think so," replied Lacy.

"Have you the keys?" asked Mortimer, addressing Peverell, and feeling the end of his nose, all the while, with the tip of his little finger.

"Yes," responded Peverell, and put on his bonnet.

This was the signal for all, and they set forth. In a few minutes they were at the Abbey, where they found the candidates, of whom Peverell had spoken, waiting.

Peverell opened the doors, and they entered. But what was their amazement, when, the moment Peverell had crossed the threshold, and before the two strangers could follow, they saw the portals close with such violence, that the noise pealed along the lofty aisles like thunder? In vain they strove to open them again; no force they could use was sufficient to turn the key. They hallooed to those on the outside: but no answer was returned.

This was sufficiently explained the next day, when they learned, that at the instant of the sudden closing of the doors, the two sceptical townsmen, who were to discover every thing, received such a hearty thwack on their heads, that they fell prostrate. In this plight, sprawling on the ground, they lay for nearly half an hour, perfectly sensible of their situation, and very desirous of changing it, but without power to move either hand or foot. They described the blow, not as if given by a hand, or a good crab stick; but as though a mass of dense air had rushed past them with exceeding velocity. When, at length, they recovered their feet, they walked quietly home! They were thoroughly satisfied; for, as they could not tell either how they were knocked down, or how kept down afterwards, on the *outside* of the Abbey, they thought they had better leave the *mysteries* of the *inside*, alone.

A momentary feeling of terror came over Peverell and the others, when they found themselves imprisoned by such means. It was some minutes before they moved from the door, round which they stood, each trying his own skill or strength, to unlock it. What added to their fears, was the very natural, though not very comfortable reflection, that they might have to remain there the greater part, if not the whole, of the night. At all events, they could expect no assistance, till a sufficient time had elapsed for the alarm which their lengthened stay would excite, to diffuse itself. Lacy, at length, broke silence:

"Confront the danger you see," said he; "but wait, till that which you expect shows itself. Let us to our seats."

He walked, or rather marched, with a firm step, towards the table, which stood, as before, at the farther extremity of the aisle. The rest followed. Overbury swaggered along, growling half-formed oaths, and looking right and left with an air of real, or admirably counterfeited, indifference. When he reached the table, he filled out a cup of wine, and tossed it off; another, and tossed that off too; then a third, which he also drank, exclaiming—"Ha! ha! 'tis thus I wait for danger!"

No one followed his example; but quietly seating themselves, Walwyn, after a short pause, observed, that they had recommenced with something like an earnest of future wonders.

"Yes," said Mortimer, with an effort to be jocular; "and I protest, I would rather be locked in here an hour in earnest, than all night in jest! I like not such jests,—unless I had my night-cap in my pocket; and even then, with only cold stones for a bed, I should be tired of the jest before morning."

"I don't think these tapers will burn more than three or four hours," observed mine host, with manifest trepidation; "they are not above half the length they were last time; and it would be marvellously unpleasant to sit in the dark."

"All the better," exclaimed Overbury, "for then we will not be frightened by looking at one another, which may chance to happen else. But why don't you drink?" he continued, filling his cup again; "and light up a fire within, which will not only warm you, if you are cold, but kindle the flame of valour in your hearts, be they ne'er so dead."

Overbury had created a sort of solitude around himself. He drank alone—talked alone—and almost sat alone; for on either side of him were the vacancies occasioned by the melancholy absence of Clayton and Wilkins. His was that unenviable privilege which men sometimes contrive to obtain: the privilege of having every thing their own way, because they are not worth a contradiction, for the sake of argument; and still less, at the price of a quarrel. De Clare, indeed, with his atrabilious temperament, was often at war with himself, to quell the risings of scorn within him, and keep back the gall-clothed words that crowded to his lips: but for the rest, they felt, merely, that chance had yoked them, for a few days, with a ruf-

fian; and like men having to walk between tar-barrels, they endeavoured, as well as they could, to avoid defiling themselves.

Even honest Owen began to think there was absolutely *less* disgrace in submitting to be called a "mountain goat" by such an antagonist, than in avenging the insult; albeit, this conviction had not become very strong, till after Fitz-Maurice had shaken his scourge in Overbury's face. It was only when his tongue grew gross and licentious, which it generally did, as the fumes of wine made him less craftily circumspect, that it became necessary to silence him; and a few cool words were always sufficient. As for Overbury himself, he was such a mere outside of a man, and so bare, within, of all affections, appetites and passions, but what were vile and brutish, he could not perceive, and, therefore, did not feel, either the supreme contempt or deep abhorrence, which he inspired. He spoke, when it was his humour; drained cup after cup, when the wine was before him; and took his lonely seat at the board, with superlative indifference, whether he was spoken to, drunk with, or sat by.

They had been about half an hour in the Abbey, and conversation had been kept up, like the firing of minute guns, each letting off an observation, or an answer in his turn, when Mortimer began to hum an old Troubadour air.

"I wish I could warble," said he, "and had sweet music in my voice, I would enliven you with a simple ditty; by my faith, I would; for there is divine power in melodious sounds——"

"To lull the tooth ache, if they put you to sleep," interrupted De Clare. "I had as lief hear a moonlight serenade on the house-top, by a whiskered convocation of love sick cats, as your amorous ballad-monger, who sighs out a stanza of whimpering words about 'bleeding hearts,' from 'Cupid's darts,' and the 'bliss of blisses' in 'love's true kisses.'"

"I wish I could hear such a serenade just now," replied Mortimer, "for I would fain laugh; and there be three things, in this world, which never fail to make me laugh."

"Imprimis——" said De Clare.

"Imprimis," continued Mortimer, "those serenades

you talk of, (and, by the soul of music, I admire your taste, 'tis excellent;) then, the sonorous bray of an ass; and, lastly, the plaintive strains of an elderly pig, who, having arrived at his years, thinks he is old enough to go alone, and protests loudly against the indignity offered to his hind leg. Oh, Jupiter! If I am to die as becomes a gentleman and a Christian, let not my last-hour be invaded by any one of these sounds; or certes, I shall go out of the world by the antipodes of my coming into it, and laugh as heartily as e'er I cried, when the midwife first exclaimed, 'by this token, 'tis a chopping boy!'

This unexpected sally of Mortimer, produced a momentary burst of mirth from all. Overbury roared. Even De Clare's lean cheeks wrinkled themselves into a smile, while Vehan's leaden eye brightened with a flash of meteor-like gaiety: seen and vanished. Who that had looked upon them at that instant, would have said they were assembled to await the coming of visitations,—from the world of shadows, perchance? So curiously are entwined, so wonderfully are blended, in us, the various springs, which, as they are touched, make the heart pass from joy to grief, from hope to despair, and from melancholy to gladness!

Their discourse now became more animated and cheerful, though still it kept wide of the business in which they were engaged. Anxious and hurried glances were cast, every now and then, round the Abbey: at times there would be a sudden silence, listening to fancied noises, and then, they would look at each other, with speaking eyes, that told their thoughts, as plainly as could their tongues.

Thus they passed the first hour; by which time, a few flowing cups, and Mortimer's sprightliness, had imparted some elasticity to their spirits.

"I think," said Walwyn, "if my kinsman be not too contemplative, he might conclude that choice ballad, or metrical romance, or whate'er it is he calls it, of Alice Gray."

"Well suggested," said De Clare. "We all seem, to-night, more inclined to be listeners, than talkers."

"Sleepers, you mean," sighed forth Vehan, unfolding his arms, and thrusting one hand into his bosom, as if intending forthwith to resume his meditations.

"Yes," said Hungerford Hoskyns, "sleepers we are like to be; and all in one bed; but it is large enough to lie without jostling."

"And high enough," added Mortimer, "to be cool and airy."

"With four stone walls for your curtains, and this pavement for your feather bed," said Owen, "you'll not be sluggards in the morning, I warrant you."

"No—nor snorers in the night, as I guess," replied Hoskyns.

"More likely chatterers," added Mortimer; "such, at least, as have teeth among us. But we do well to sport with our misery ere we feel it. When it pinches us, and our green and yellow cheeks, blue lips, and aguish bodies, shall make us sigh for a Smithfield luxury, roasting by a slow fire, I'll engage to write all the jests we then utter upon my thumb nail; ay, and let the first man who laughs, make a foot-ball of me—kick me up and down, to keep himself warm."

"Wilt thou be our mountebank, *now*," said De Clare, "and amuse us? If not, why, with thy parrot tongue, dost thou interrupt the entertainment that *is* provided?"

"Do you know, De Clare," replied Mortimer, gaily, "you often put me in mind of one of those great egg-bellied spiders, which it was my delight, in my school-boy years, to watch by the hour, in some dark nook of my father's garden? The wily monarch of the web lay treacherously in one corner, watching for some gilded fly, fluttering in the sunbeams, which he might rush upon and devour, the moment it was enmeshed. Thus far my parable and this its application: *you*, are the great egg-bellied spider—I the pretty gilded fly, whom you would fain devour, but cannot. And now for the entertainment, which you say is provided."

Walwyn repeated his request to Vehan, wishing to interfere between Mortimer and the caustic retort, which he saw De Clare was preparing. Peverell, Hoskyns, Lacy, and the rest, joined their solicitations.

"I swear," said Vehan, "by the insulted dignity of my muse, I will not again profane her inspirations, and administer them to you like a dose of poppies. No more of my university rhymes, to weigh down your eye-lids, and make you all forsworn, when you wake. But," and he

sighed grievously, "if it may content you, to hear in homely prose, what befell Dame Alice on that fearful night, I will labour for your satisfaction."

"It shall content us," said De Clare; "so proceed."

Vehan looked exceedingly dismal; but he began; and, as on the former occasion, when he had once given his tongue the license to speak, his manner was impressive, and, occasionally, even animated.



CHAPTER VIII.

"It would be difficult," said he, smiling, "to say at what part of my ballad metre each of you fell asleep; so I must bid you fancy Dame Alice arrived at her journey's end; much terrified, and sorely jolted. But whither she was brought she knew not; for the bandage on her eyes was not removed, till she had been led up many steps, across spacious halls, along echoing passages, and through numerous chambers, to the one in which the lady was who needed her assistance. It was then taken off, and she found herself in a large room, filled with rare furniture, such as might denote almost a regal mansion.

"There were no persons in the room, but a tall, portly man, richly dressed, who was striding up and down, in great agitation; and the lady herself, who lay moaning on a bed that stood in one corner. They who had conducted Alice, retired immediately after they had untied her eyes.

"'To your mystery—' exclaimed the man, with a stern voice, pointing to the bed; and, at the same time, stirring up the logs of wood which blazed on the hearth.

"Alice approached the bed. On it lay a lady, beautiful and young, from whose eyes the tears fell faster than did sighs and groans escape from her bursting heart.—Alice strove to sooth her: but she refused all comfort.

"'This is cruel mercy!' she cried. 'Let me rather die by thy hand, and my innocent babe be unborn, than

kill me with thy savage purpose. Though guiltless, I am content to die!’

“‘What sayest thou, dear lady?’ replied Alice; ‘nay, be comforted!—’tis a heavy pain to bear; but thou wilt smile, anon, when this pennyworth of grief buys thee a groat of happiness. There now—that was a kindly throe—patience, chuck!—patience, dear heart!—Ay, ay, ’twill soon be over, and you a joyful mother!—there—there—bear up!—belike it is your first-born you labour with.’

“‘Ay, and her *last-born*!’ exclaimed her husband; for he it was, who paced the floor with hurried strides,” observed Vehan, “and whom, for the convenience of my narrative, I shall call Lord Eustace.

“‘No, no, I’ll warrant you—not her last-born,’ replied the old crone, with a leer and a chuckle: ‘these fair limbs shall bear many a rich burden yet.’”

“‘Peace, beldam!’ said Lord Eustace, ‘and do thine office with a silent tongue!’”

“‘I protest,” interrupted Mortimer, addressing Vehan, “thou art an excellent old woman, and dost narrate to the life—e’en as if thou hadst overheard all, and, with an admirable memory, didst repeat only what was said.”

“‘How many groanings have you been at?’ said De Clare, “that you esteem yourself so nice a judge? But I wish you would do your office, which is that of listener, with a silent tongue.”

“‘Then would he do more than Alice did,” continued Vehan; “for still the garrulous dame went chattering on; though she did not venture to cross her moody master with another ribald jest.

“‘Hey-day! and alack for shame!’ cried she, a minute or two after, ‘where be the needful gear for the precious babe, when ’tis born, and the fitting preparation for the lady mother? I must be better provided, or all my art and care may fail to prosper. Now, the Lord forgive me! But my aged eyes are purblind, though, truth to say, they should all be ready to my hand.’

“‘Silence, witch!, roared Lord Eustace, as he gripped her shoulder—‘silence, and despatch. Give *me* the thing you wait for, and you shall have gold—ay, gold enough to strew with ease the few years that lie between you and the grave, so that you may work no more—Here,’ he continued, placing a well-filled purse in her hands, ‘let

my reward fore-run your deserving; and now with speed o'ertake it; for my impatience will not wait much longer."

"“Oh, God!” exclaimed the lady, “wilt thou permit this iniquity? Wilt thou wink at this monstrous crime, though, as yet, intention only hath committed it?”

"“What sayest thou, wanton?” cried her husband, as he drew back the curtains at the foot of the bed, and looked fiercely upon his miserable wife, in her extremity of grief—what sayest thou?”

"“I but prayed to Heaven,” said she, sobbing violently, “for mercy on thy unborn child!”

"“*Mine!* lewd devil!” he exclaimed—“mine! adulteress! Out upon thee, obdurate liar! ’Tis the bastard fruit of thy lustful wickedness with the base hind who already lies low for his share of the brat!”

"“Heaven pardon thee thy foul suspicions,” said the lady, “and turn thy heart from its horrid purpose! I would that my soul were as pure from all other sin, as it is from this stain of thy distempered fancy! Then might I bid the angels of heaven prepare to receive me!”

"“Wilt thou confess?”

"“What?”

"“That my bed—this bed, whereon the fulness of thy guilty act hath now stretched thee in a teeming mother’s pains—hath been dishonoured—hath witnessed thy unlawful love, and the blistering shame that burns upon thy brow?”

"“Never!”

"“Not though it redeemed the now struggling burden of thy false womb from the sacrifice that awaits it?”

"“No! God’s will be done, I say! And if it be his will that I should bear my innocent babe, mingling the tender cries of new-born life with the sad shrieks of an instant and most terrible death, why, be it so! But I will not, guiltless as I am, brand myself with infamy—I will not proclaim my lawful issue adulterate—I will not—I, the daughter of a virtuous and honourable stock—write myself a strumpet!”

"“Why, you *are* one!” replied Lord Eustace, with a cold, malignant sneer.—“A notorious one! There is not, in the harlotry of the most rank brothel, such another!”

"“For shame, my lord, to say so!”

“ ‘Ten thousand shames on thy hot blood and polluted body, that warrant me to say so !’

“ ‘Why, have you ever denied me the proof of your unjust suspicions, when I have called for them? If you know me guilty, you must know when, and how, and with whom? Tell me each circumstance, of time, of place, of person, the belief whereof hath made you wrong me so grievously: and, if I cannot disprove all, and come out of the trial as holy as grace itself, then hew me limb from limb; let your vengeance make piece-meal of me, and cast my disloyal remains for carrion birds to feed on !’

“ ‘I cry you mercy !’ said Lord Eustace. ‘A woman’s subtlety to hide her wantonness, is never less than her will to practise it. I am not so dull in the world’s craft, as not to know, that when we fall from heaven, hell stands open to receive us; and the devil is a shrewd counsellor.’

“ ‘Alas ! alas !’ exclaimed the poor sufferer, who hardly heeded her body’s pangs, in the o’er-mastering anguish of her mind,—‘that truth should be so weak in her own cause !’

“ ‘Thou false one !’ continued her husband, with increasing fury.—‘Thou matchless hypocrite !—thou cunning pander to thine own heart’s lechery !—thou knowest, even better than I can tell thee, how lewdly thou hast broken thy marriage vows, how grossly thou art forsworn ! Ay, let fall thy tears,—they are the bitter waters of shame for guilt, which they can never wash away. Oh !—but that I am armed in proof, and that my burning wrongs quench them as they fall, I should grow frantic to see my once soul’s idol, the peerless creature whom I loved, as if the whole world’s perfections lived all in her thus the prey of sorrow !’

“ ‘Believe me, and you may, my lord !’ she exclaimed, in a low, and scarcely articulate voice, ‘I am innocent !’

“ ‘It is too late !’

“ ‘Then God’s will be done, I say again ! and may his pardon reach thee, Lord Eustace; thou injurious husband, and most false accuser of thy most chaste wife !’

“ ‘Amen ! to that, with all my soul,’ he exclaimed, and walked to another part of the room.

“ Dame Alice had listened to this sad dialogue with

fear and trembling. But now, she resumed her attentions towards the hapless lady, whom in defiance of the rebuffs she had already received, she tried to console. Mean while, nature was hastening the moment of relief, and before the expiration of another half hour, a man child was born.

“‘The blessing of Heaven be upon thee, thou pretty one!’ exclaimed Alice, as she held it in her arms; ‘thou art as like thy misgiving father as two peas!’”

“‘Is it alive?’ said Lord Eustace, rushing towards Alice.

“‘Ay, I warrant!’ she replied; ‘and with a sweet smile upon its face, as if it had come into the world only to outface the villanous suspicion of its begetting.’”

“‘Give it me!’ and he tore it from the midwife’s arms.

“‘Mercy, mercy!’ exclaimed the mother. ‘Be a man, if the yearnings of a father are dead within thee!’”

“‘Ay!’ he continued, looking at the infant, while his features were convulsed with rage—‘ay, ay, here is a damning proof!—how the paramour mocks me in every feature!—how legibly bastard is written upon this brow! Out of my sight, thou blot! thou lust-begotten, false-engendered patch!’”

“The lady uttered a piercing shriek! Alice stood aghast! ‘Oh, God!’ she exclaimed, and buried her face in the pillows of the bed.

“The maddened husband, and self-denying father, with the look and gesture of a demon, cast the innocent babe upon the blazing fire, and then heaped upon it the burning embers! Its screams were loud and terrific! The noise of its crackling flesh, as it shrivelled up in the fierce flames, could be distinctly heard! But in less than a minute all was still, except that one appalling sound!

“‘My revenge is satisfied!’ said he, as he turned round the now blackening and fast consuming body of the child, while, at the same time, he thrust it farther beneath the flaming brands. ‘No spurious issue, sprung from other loins than mine, lives now to call me father, and in that same word denounce me cuckold! For thee, thou vile confederate in this act,’ he continued, approaching the bed, ‘live, if Heaven will have it so; but live a banished woman from the world, and pass thy rest of life in the

cold observance of cloistered chastity, and the daily penance of penitential prayer!"

"'Poor soul!' said Alice: 'I do believe her gentle spirit hath taken its flight already. She never spoke nor moved, after you tore her sweet babe from me; but uttered one dismal shriek, when——'

"'No more!' exclaimed Lord Eustace, as he gazed upon the pale features of his wife. 'If what you say be true, your task is finished—and it would grieve me more to find it is not, than that it is. If guilt like hers can survive an hour, virtue should be immortal.'

"Alice was right. The wretched lady had expired with horror at the ferocious deed of vengeance perpetrated by her husband, who seemed only to rejoice the more, in this crowning act of his sanguinary triumph.

"'What, ho! without there!' he exclaimed, stamping with his foot violently; when one of the three men who had invaded Alice's cottage that night, immediately entered.

"'You know your business,' said he. 'Convey her back as you brought her—and, do you mark—not a word, nor even a whisper, that she can babble about.'

"The eyes of Alice were now covered as before, and she was led forth through many a winding passage, and down numerous flights of steps, till she perceived she was in the open air. She then felt an arm tightly grasping her body, and the next moment she was mounted on a horse, behind some one, whom she, in her turn, grasped as tightly. Not a word was spoken: and when she arrived at her own cottage, she was lifted off with the same silence, and the horsemen instantly rode away. All she knew was, that her escort back consisted of a single squire, instead of three cavaliers to attend her."

"And was the caitiff never brought to justice?" said De Clare.

"You shall hear," replied Vehan, "by what a subtle device the criminal was shortly after discovered. Alice, afraid to speak, while the inhuman butchery was about, or when it was accomplished, bethought her of means by which due punishment might, perchance, fall upon Lord Eustace. She secretly contrived to cut a piece from the rich velvet hanging of the bed, which she brought safely away with her. And now, next day, going before a magistrate,

she disclosed the whole of the bloody tragedy, and related how she had possessed herself of a clew that might direct the arm of justice where it should strike. She was much commended for her shrewdness; and the enormous crime being made known to the highest officers of the law, orders were promptly given that strict and diligent search should be made, till the very house were discovered, wherein should be a bed whose hangings corresponded with the piece which Alice had cut off, and that piece itself fitted to the very place whence it had been cut. At length, they came to the princely mansion of Lord Eustace, and, where they least expected, found the evidence they were in quest of. Potent as he was, not only in himself, but in his alliances, which stretched even to the throne, yet his offence was too crimson to let the sword of justice be turned aside. He was arraigned, tried, condemned, and, before his execution, confessed his guilt. Nor was this all. He lived long enough to learn, that a subtle fiend had, with devilish malice, abused his ear, and wrought upon his jealous nature by counterfeit proofs of his innocent lady's supposed infidelity; and, with this heavy load of bitter remorse, he laid his head upon the block!"



CHAPTER IX.

"WHAT hissing noise is that?" said Peverell, when Vehan had concluded. "I have heard it several times."

"I do not hear it," replied Walwyn, listening.—"Yes! now I do!"

"Plainly," added De Clare, as they all sat in silent expectation of what was to take place.

"It is here!" cried Overbury, starting up, and looking round.

The chimes went twelve. The doors of the Abbey burst open with a tremendous sound. They strained their eyes, to discover if any thing approached. A loud shriek from Vehan suddenly drew their attention towards

him. He was writhing about, as if in much agony, and his countenance expressed the utmost terror.

At that moment, they beheld the head of some prodigious monster, with flaming eyes, and a triple tongue, projecting from jaws which were armed with a double row of sharp fangs, slowly rearing itself behind Vehan's chair, and glaring and hissing over his shoulders. Vehan still screamed and writhed. The table was quickly dragged away, and they then discovered the cause of his torture. The whole of the lower part of his body, his legs, thighs, and waist, were encircled by the voluminous folds of this enormous creature, whose size was vast and terrific. They could distinguish many yards of its black, glossy skin, shining along the ground till it was lost in the obscurity of distance. In bulk, the smallest part of what was visible exceeded the circumference of an athletic man's arm, while the dimensions of that portion which was coiled around Vehan, were equal nearly to the trunk of a large tree. Its head was frightfully hideous, partaking something of the human form, but more square than oval, with two small ears standing erect, and covered with short, black bristles. It continued rearing itself up, rolling and twisting its arched neck about, and gradually twining higher and higher round Vehan's body, who struggled in vain to shake off the ugly monster, or even to rise from his chair, so powerful was the constriction, and so ponderous the pressure.

"Kill it—kill it!" he exclaimed, gasping while he strove convulsively to tear himself away.

Walwyn drew his rapier, and made an eager thrust at the monster. The point of his weapon passed through it, as if it were of no substance, but merely air, and pierced Vehan.

He groaned and fell. The others gathered round, and struck at the filthy creature with their swords; but, to their horror and amazement, their edges seemed to fall upon Vehan only.

The stupendous reptile had now uncoiled itself, hissing with increased violence, and its eyes flaming like burning torches, while they continued to aim the most furious blows at its head and neck. They were at length convinced it was either a mere phantom, or that it possessed some miraculous property of instantly closing again

wherever it was wounded. They knew their swords passed through it, for they clattered against the walls and pavement. In this way they followed it half down the aisle, the creature still receding from them, and as it receded, diminishing in length, without increasing in bulk, as if, at each fold and surge, which it made of its tortuous body, successive portions of it dissolved away—till at last nothing remained, but a little round black substance, which seemed to sink into the earth!

When they returned to Vehan, they found him lying on the ground, bleeding, and in the agonies of death. He had received several wounds; but the one from which the blood streamed most profusely, and which of itself appeared sufficient to destroy life, was that given by Walwyn's rapier. It had penetrated near the heart, if not into it.

Walwyn was distracted. He knelt down by his kinsman, wept aloud, and held his hand to his side, endeavouring to staunch the blood; but life was ebbing fast. Vehan felt how it was with him, and grasping the hand of Walwyn affectionately, while he turned upon him a look of tender sorrow, as knowing the anguish which must possess his mind at so disastrous an accident, he gently exclaimed, "It was well meant, though sadly done—but afflict not yourself; I already see glimpses of what is to come—and your sword was not——"

"What?" said Walwyn, in a voice choked with grief.

"Self-directed," added Vehan, faintly, and fell back in the arms of Walwyn, who was supporting him. He never spoke again; but after two or three heavy, long-drawn sighs, lay still and motionless.

Walwyn threw himself upon the body, and could not for several minutes be induced to quit it. He sobbed and wept, more like a child, than a man. He had always felt greatly attached to Vehan; not only as he was his kinsman, but on account of the many fine qualities which he knew belonged to him; and partly attracted by that ethereal disposition which made him a creature of pure intellect, almost, wedded to silent contemplation and deep musings. The thought was insupportable to him, that he had fallen, as he believed, by his hand; for, in the first paroxysm of his grief, he never once reflected upon what had been the immediate cause of his own act, and the possible one of the event which he deplored.

It was some time before any of them could withdraw their minds from the melancholy object before them, to speak of what had occurred. De Clare at length broke silence.

"How incomprehensible it is," said he, "that each night we have been within these walls, a life has been sacrificed."

"That is not the only incomprehensible part of the business," observed Lacy; "remember the sudden closing of the doors when we entered—"

"Ay," interrupted De Clare, "as if we were numbered for an allotted task, which needs nor fewer nor more."

"That inference, carried to its full extent," said Peverell, "would assign us, severally, to a fate, which, with such fore-knowledge, though resting only on surmise, we should be madmen to tempt."

"I say not, absolutely, what your speech aims at," replied De Clare, "but what then? Foregone events—the things we know—make up all our reasonings about what is unknown, shape them how we will."

"Yes," answered Peverell; "and if that which we are now engaged in, could be judged as we judge the common affairs of life, I should be apt enough to take the past as the forerunner of the future; even as its very symbol and type. But we are strayers in the dark, and though we keep the path, we see neither how far we have advanced, nor how much farther we have to advance! We are all ready to exclaim at what has this night been witnessed; but wherein does it transcend in mystery, the first or second night? Wherein the manifold circumstances of each day, I might almost say of each hour, since the beginning of this great mystery itself? We are wandering among dreams and shadows—and for my single self, I feel so entangled in the still thickening maze, that to go on seems my only chance of getting free."

"It is even so with us all," said Lacy; "though none of us have been singled out, as you have, from first to last."

"Three nights more," exclaimed De Clare, "and, if Fitz-Maurice juggle not, we shall see the last."

"For which sight I own myself impatient—nay, almost weary," added Peverell.

"As who amongst us is not?" replied De Clare. "Another week of such a life as this, would be too dear a price for a long course of happy years. To lie thus on the rack of apprehension—to be tossed to and fro, amidst a sea of hopes, of doubts and fears,—with once, in every circuit of the blessed sun, a scene like this which is now before us, to shake our natures, would make us lunatics, or argue us no better."

"Well!" said Walwyn, rising from the seat into which he had thrown himself, when gently removed from the body of Vehan; "I suppose we have completed this night's task—or, rather, *my* accursed hand hath offered up the bloody sacrifice! Oh, God!" he continued, while tears burst from him afresh; "how infinitely happier I should account myself, were I the stricken deer, and he the living mourner of my death!"

They endeavoured to soften the poignancy of Walwyn's grief, by reminding him, that even admitting it was the wound he had inflicted, which had caused the tragical event, still there ought to be no bitterness of self-reproach mingled with his sorrow; for his intention was not only blameless, but exemplary.

"It would be as rational," observed De Clare, "to arraign yourself as his assassin, if your kinsman had been attacked by midnight murderers, and you, in striving to save his life, had believed you killed him by a random thrust. I say believed; for see, he hath other wounds. But if he had none, how know you that the scaly monster which enfolded him, would have quitted him unscathed? Nay, veiled, as all that happens is, how can you assure yourself, or, rather, how can you incline to the mere opinion, that the apparent, was the real, cause of what hath taken place?"

"Moreover," added Peverell, "did he not, as he expired, bid you not be afflicted, for that your sword was not self-directed?"

"He did," replied Walwyn, dejectedly; "and said he already saw glimpses of what was to come."

"Yes!" exclaimed De Clare, "and such prescience, or inspiration, doth often dwell within us, when our bodies are preparing for the grave, and our souls for eternity! This world recedes—the next opens before us!—Darkness descends upon the past—the brightness and the

glory of the ever-living God himself falls upon the future. Man beholds not, then, in the flesh, but in the spirit: and what he speaks, it is prophetic. Do not doubt it," continued De Clare, with unwonted energy; "the last moments of the dying, are the first of everlasting life. We are then on the confines of two worlds, and our parting agonies here are but the commencing torments of hereafter; as the calmly expiring good man, is already wrapt into beatitude, before the closing sigh which makes him immortal, breathes through his lips!"

Walwyn derived as much comfort as the mind ever derives from mere exhortations to be comforted. The consolation that really finds its way to a mourning heart, is either borne upon the wings of time, or created out of considerations and circumstances, known only to the heart that mourns. All else settles in the ear merely, and seems to do the office it assumes, because it withdraws the attention from the cause of grief; but it leaves the grief itself undisturbed.

It now became necessary to consider what should be done that night with the body of Vehan; when Walwyn himself proposed the course, which at once suggested itself to all, though no one liked to mention it; and that was, to leave it in the Abbey till the morning. This was accordingly done; De Clare, Peverell, Lacy, and mine host, assisting to place it on chairs. The countenance was extremely placid, and the blood had ceased to flow from any of the wounds.

As they retired, Walwyn leaned over the body, and kissed the forehead. The doors were already open, and Peverell found no difficulty now in locking them.

They had scarcely proceeded a hundred yards from the Abbey, when Mortimer observed, with one of his usual protestations, they "had left their sea-calf behind, Overbury."

"Did he not come out with us?" said De Clare.

"If he did, where is he?" answered Hoskyns, looking round: "the moon is bright, and we should see him."

"Hang him!" exclaimed De Clare; "it were no sin, but a good deed, to leave him there; especially if there were a chance of not finding him in the morning."

"What shall we do?" said Owen Rees.

"I know not," replied De Clare, "except that I would

not turn my head to look after him. He must have ensconced himself in some dark corner, o'ercome with drink; or we should have seen him as we left the Abbey."

"Here," said Peverell, addressing mine host, "take the keys, run back, and open the doors for him."

"The lights are all out," cried Wintour, "and I shall not be able to see him."

"Roar to him, then," said Mortimer; "and if you do not wake him with your own sweet voice, the echo of it along those aisles will be sure to do it for you."

"I shall not go farther than the door, as I am a vintner," quoth mine host, receiving the key. "And you'll wait for me?"

"Ay," replied De Clare; "we will wait, an' you keep us not too long."

"I warrant I'll not do that; for I shall roar but thrice, I promise you." And mine host hastened back, with all the speed which his short legs, and seven inches of fat on the kidneys, would allow.

He opened the door, and "Hallo! hallo! Wilfred Overbury!" quoth he. No answer; but the echo of his own voice, which he liked not. "What! ho! Mister Overbury! Come out—you are in the dark—and we are all gone!" Still only hollow reverberations, which seemed to mine host as if there were more voices than his; and he drew back the leg which, at first, he had manfully put over the threshold. He held the door fast, leaving just space enough for his mouth. "I say!" quoth he, "you had better not sleep there—you will catch cold—we can't wait!" Mine host now heard something—a sort of rustling noise—but, it occurred to him, it was as likely to be Vehan as Overbury; nay, more likely; for he knew the one was in the Abbey, and was not sure that the other was. So he locked the door, and made the best of his way back.

"He is not there," quoth he, returning the keys to Peverell, and puffing as if he had been running for a wager, two miles upon uneven ground.

"Not there!" said Peverell.

"You heard me call, didn't you?" quoth mine host.

"No," replied Mortimer, "we did not."

"Well, then, you might," answered Wintour; "for I roared loud enough, and three times, too; but could not make any body hear."

"My life upon it," said De Clare, "he reeled out, soon after the doors flew open, while we were gathered round Vehan; and ere this, he snores away the fumes of the wine he drank, in his bed."

"It must be so, I think," replied Peverell, "or he would certainly have heard the hailing of mine host, whose pipe is no virgin's delicate treble."

"Oh, it is so," added Mortimer; "and if 'twere not, having saved our manners by that to which mine host can testify, I protest I, for one, shall not sleep the worse, for any trouble it will give me as to where that lump of live pitch sticks for the night."

It was no longer doubted that De Clare's conjecture was right, and that Overbury had slunk away, unperceived, soon after the bursting open of the doors. This was the more readily concluded, too, because no one remembered to have seen him subsequently to his starting up, when they first heard the hissing of the monster before it became visible. They, therefore, continued their progress to that part of the town where they usually separated for their respective homes.

"How is it to be to-morrow?" said Lacy. "Shall we meet at an early hour, now to be appointed, or leave it to be determined by circumstances?"

"I would recommend neither," replied De Clare, "but rather this: to re-assemble at your house, by seven o'clock to-morrow evening, certainly; or, at any hour before that time, if there be need."

This was at once assented to, and they separated.



CHAPTER X.

It was early the next morning, and before Peverell had sat down to his breakfast, that he was surprised by a summons to hasten, with all speed, to *The Rose*. The messenger was no farther explicit, except that his manner was an ample index to a dismal volume.

Peverell lost not a moment in obeying what appeared

to be so urgent a call; and when he arrived at *The Rose*, he was soon satisfied he had not been bidden forth upon light grounds. To his equal horror and surprise, he learned that mine host had been found lifeless in his bed that morning, and that the Venetian youth, or, as Tim the ostler expressed himself, "the gipsy vagrabitum had absconded." No noise had been heard in the course of the night, by those who slept in the house; and it was supposed the murderer must have escaped out of window, for none of the doors were unbarred.

"Then how do you know he *has* absconded?" said Peverell.

"We have hunted in every hole and corner," replied Tim, brandishing a pitch-fork, "and if we had found him, wouldn't I have stuck him like a rat, or a mad dog?"

"Where did he sleep?" continued Peverell.

"Here, an' please you," answered Tim, pointing to a truckle bed, in a dark closet, which opened from the passage in which they were standing.

"And where did your master sleep?"

"Above," quoth Tim.

"Were any bolts or locks broken to get into his chamber?"

"None," said a plump, black-eyed wench, who sat crying in a corner; "my master was never wont to lock his door; for I used to go to him, after he was a-bed, sometimes, to ask him if he wanted any thing."

"Hold the tongue, fool!" said Tim, as if he felt a laudable anxiety for the preservation of family secrets. Mine host was a bachelor.

"I only speak the truth," replied Lucy; "I never found any difficulty in getting into my master's room."

"I know thee didst not," quoth Tim, with a grin.

"What hath been stolen?" inquired Peverell.

"Nothing, as we can discover," answered Tim. "If a mouse only had absconded, it would have left more marks behind of it breaking out."

Peverell now ascended to the chamber of Wintour, and found mine host a corpse in his bed. There was no blood on the clothes, nor any signs of violence about the person of Wintour, except two black marks on each side of his throat, and a livid appearance of his countenance, as if he had been strangled. It must have been done,

too, with a powerful grasp, producing instant suffocation. almost; for he lay as if he had died without struggling, and the bed clothes were not at all disturbed.

"Who saw him last, alive?" said Peverell.

"I did not see him alive," answered Tim, "after he went out yesternight, to go to the Abbey, I believe; when he told me to have the crop-ear'd pony ready by sun-rise, for he had business at Dunstable to-day, and must start with the dawn."

"Who was up when he returned from the Abbey?" continued Peverell.

"I, an' please you, sir," said Lucy, with a courtesy.

"Was the stranger in bed, then?"

"Yes, an' please you!"

"They did not see each other, nor hold any conversation together?"

"No, an' please you!"

"And your master, then, went to bed?"

"Yes, an' please you!"

"And that was the last you saw of him?"

"No, an' please you!"

"I mean," continued Peverell, "that was the last time you saw him alive?"

"No, an' please you?" said Lucy, rolling up one corner of her apron, with downcast eyes and scarlet cheeks.

"Did *you* go to bed soon after?" added Peverell, who now began to penetrate Lucy's equivocation.

"Yes, an' please you, sir!"

"Do you sleep alone?" inquired Peverell.

"Sometimes, an' please you, sir!"

"Did you sleep alone last night?"

"I was 'fraid, an' please you, sir! on account of the strange man who was in the house."

"And, therefore, you crept, for company and comfort——"

"Yes, an' please you, sir!" and the apron was rolled up with both thumbs at once.

"Now tell me, wench," said Peverell; "for it may import much to know the fact, what was the latest hour at which you saw this poor man alive?"

"About four o'clock, an' please you!" replied Lucy, with a very sheepish air.

"And then——"

"And then," she continued, "I went to bed and fell asleep."

"That is, you went to your *own* bed," added Peverell.

"Yes, an' please you, sir!" replied Lucy, with her everlasting bob for a courtesy.

Tim, and the drawer, who was also present, listened to this confession with a salacious leer, not unmixed with an expression of coarse triumph, as if some recollections of rejected advances were appeased by Lucy's unexpected disclosure. Peverell, mean while, proceeded to examine the room in which he then was; and afterwards other parts of the house; but he could not discover any one circumstance which helped to explain either the motives of the assassin, or the manner of his escape. It was clear, from Lucy's account, that the murder must have been perpetrated at an advanced hour of the morning; and it was equally clear, that plunder was not the murderer's object, for no one drawer, or strong place had been broken open; not even a purse, which lay on the table in Wintour's room, had been touched.

What, then, could have been the inducement? He inquired particularly, whether any angry words had passed between mine host and the youth, knowing upon what slight provocation life was often sacrificed, by the vindictive and quick-resenting natives of the country whence he came; but he learned, on the contrary, as, indeed, Wintour had himself told him, that the silent and gloomy Venetian had scarcely spoken to any one the whole evening, and had retired early to his pallet.

The only thing that remained for Peverell to do was to hasten to the mayor, inform him of the atrocious deed, and, through his authority, despatch scouts in every direction, to overtake the heartless criminal, who had thus requited kindness and hospitality. He could not help reflecting, as he proceeded along, upon the narrow escape he had probably had himself, when he so earnestly pressed the youth to accept the shelter of his roof. The mayor had a similar feeling, when Peverell acquainted him with the murder; for he, too, urged him to remain: and they both concluded, that wherever he had slept, the same catastrophe would have taken place, inasmuch as there was no one circumstance which led them to suppose

he either had, or could have had, a cause of personal enmity towards poor Wintour.

The mayor was prompt in taking the necessary steps for the pursuit and apprehension of the murderer, and, in less than half an hour, there were six or eight active, daring fellows, scouring the adjacent country in as many different directions.

"I have no manner of doubt," said he, "that I shall have him before me again, ere sunset; and I pray God I may: for homicide is a grievous crime, under any shape; but here its complexion is black indeed. Who would have thought his crocodile tears, and that fabled oration of his, were masks covering so deformed and foul a heart? Marry, and I would not swear, as things now look, that he did not kill his own father! Well, well; we do not often mend first thoughts; and if I had taken counsel from mine own, poor Jack Wintour, honest Jack Wintour, as I have ever heard mine host of *The Rose* called, would now be mine host still; for, verily, I had more than a month's mind to send the varlet to prison at once."

"And if you had," replied Peverell, "though as it may now seem, (but which you cannot know) you would have prevented a most sinful deed, yet would you have done wrong then; for, it is justice, that no man who is accused, shall be condemned unheard."

"But see how great a good would have been obtained, at the expense of a little wrong," rejoined his worship.

"Not a little wrong," said Peverell, "to deny another the exercise of his lawful right, in the very moment when he has most need of what service it can do him. How would your argument have told last night? Then, you must have rejoiced to think you did not take counsel from your first thoughts, but, on the contrary, granted the common privilege to the culprit; for, by hearing him, you administered strict justice. It is for Omnipotence only, to whom all time is one eternal present, to shape what is, by what shall be. Man is presumptuous, when, upon his purblind glimpses of to-morrow, he dares do wrong to-day; and most weak, if, doing right to-day, he would wish it undone, for any knowledge that to-morrow brings."

His worship did not seem to be much edified by the

somewhat subtle casuistry of Peverell, for he still insisted "it would have been most fortunate if he had sent the fellow to prison right or wrong." And Peverell was as little satisfied with his worship's view of the case; for, he believed, that if the Venetian were indeed the murderer of Wintour, his purpose did not hang by so slight a thread as the chance of what might be the effect of any thing he should say in his own defence. There appeared, indeed, to be a singular chain of circumstances in the business, when connected altogether, from the first act of robbery, to the last, of murder; and, disciplined as his mind had lately been, by seeming accidents, which had turned out premeditated contrivances, he half persuaded himself that Wintour's death was a veiled mystery.



CHAPTER XI.

BEFORE Peverell left the Mayor's, and just as he had intimated to him that they intended repeating their visit to the Abbey that night, they were interrupted by the arrival of Giles Goosecap, the head-borough, whose face expressed, before his tongue could speak, that he had something terrible to unfold.

"Well, Giles," said his worship, "what hath befallen, that thou comest in such haste, and with so crazed a look?"

"Beshrew me," quoth Goosecap, "I am amazed; and, what is more, bewildered, and, what is more, astonished, and, what is more than all, I am perplexed!"

"Well:—and the cause—the matter—the occasion,—and, moréover, the particular circumstance of your four predicaments?" said Peverell, humouring the amplitude of Giles's category.

"You don't know, then?—That is, you hav'n't been surprised of what hath happened? Why, the whole town is in a state of promotion, or, as a body might say, it is exaggerated from one end to the other."

"Pooh—pooh," exclaimed his worship, "your news travels with a snail's pace—I have learned any time this half hour, the doleful tidings of poor Jack Wintour's death, and, by this, it is a noble to a penny that the murderer is overtaken."

"Why, there it is," replied the head-borough,—“there it is—marry, there it is! A man is taken up, as it were, and set down, too, if I may be so bold to say as much, in your worship's worshipful presence, before he can deliver himself, be he ne'er so stupendous in his brevity.”

"To the point, good Master Goosecap," said the mayor, interrupting him—"to the point; for I must forth on business."

"I am an old man, now," quoth Giles, "and have grown gray and honourable in mine office, as you see; for I do well remember, it was on the very day our gracious queen was born—no, I am wrong,—it was on the very day her gracious father married her gracious mother—the fair Anna Bullen,—"

"To do which," interrupted Peverell, "he, with no grace at all, put away his most virtuous and saint-like queen, the Lady Katherine."

"I remember that, too," continued Giles, "but I am a peaceable man, as a discreet constable ought to be, seeing it is his vocation to keep the peace—and, therefore, I never meddle with matters that don't belong to the parish—but, as I was saying—Out upon it! I am a villain, if I have not clean forgot what it was I was saying.—Well, well!—to think how a man's wits may decay before his body, though they be the elder born."

"Have you clean forgot what you came about?" said his worship, impatiently.

"Marry have I not, and I was coming to it, an' I had not been circumvented, by your worship, and my master here.—But touching the doleful death of poor Jack Wintour—"

"I tell thee," exclaimed the mayor, with increasing impatience, "I know all about it!"

"By the mass, then," quoth Goosecap, "'tis more than I do; and yet, methinks, I ought to be the first comprised, when any offence against her majesty's lieges is committed; that I may, forthwith, that is with all convenient despatch, which is as much as to say, diligently or without

prevarication, pursue the offender. But let that pass. Your worship is acquainted, which is enough; you will impart to me your constructions upon the business anon:—and I have a head to contrive the best manner, when I am properly distrusted, for inventing a knave's escape. But now to the present matter. The Abbey must be exercised, your worship—that is, it must be enchanted—or, in other words, the foul fiend must be laid by the heels, or no honest man, who is an honest man, and has the fear of Satan before his eyes, will live in St. Albans."

"Why, what's the matter now?" said Peverell, quickly.

"The matter!" quoth Giles—"by St. Nicholas, he were a better scholar than I am, who could tell you, Master Peverell. But this I know: there swims no goose in all England, an' there be not a hundred and more, of our townsmen, housewives and bairnes not reckoned, who are listening, with pale cheeks, and up-turned eyes, to the bellowing of Beelzebub."

"Be explicit, if you can," said Peverell, impatiently, and half-angrily.

"I will," replied Goosecap, "I will, as thou shalt see. I was e'en at my breakfast, when——"

"Never mind your breakfast—what of the Abbey?" interrupted his worship.

"Well then," quoth the head-borough, "I will not be implicit—but to the matter at once."

"Ay," responded Peverell, "that is what we would have."

"I know it," said Giles, "and thus it was. When I had finished my breakfast——"

"You went to the Abbey," said Peverell, anxious to get Goosecap so far, at any rate.

"No," quoth Giles, "I did not go to the Abbey—the more is the pity—for if I had, perchance——"

At this moment Crab entered, who informed his master that there were four or five of the townfolk who craved a word with him; and, he added, "they inquired whether Master Peverell was here."

"What is their business?" said his worship.

"I did not ask," replied Crab, "but they told me to say they had come from the Abbey."

"Bring them hither," said his worship. "They will tell, at once, what this dotard would, but cannot."

"Dotard!" exclaimed Goosecap,—*"dotard! Take mine office, if I have lived too long! Take mine office, if I have revived my powers to reform its injunctions—if——"*

The worthy head-borough was cut short in the midst of his appeal, by the entrance of half a dozen of the townspeople, who soon enabled Peverell to understand what was the matter. It was clear to him, from their statement, that Overbury had been locked in over night, and that he was then battering at the doors, and exercising his lungs, in search of a speedy deliverance. Peverell, therefore, briefly explained the circumstance to his worship, and hastening to his own house for the keys, proceeded instantly to the Abbey; where he found, as Goosecap had said, an assemblage of nearly two hundred persons, collected by the roaring and clatter of the enraged Overbury. They, not being in the secret, looked at Peverell with astonishment when he approached the doors for the purpose of unlocking them. They trembled for *his* safety; but they took care of their own, by taking to their heels; expecting nothing less, when the doors were opened, than to see some fiend or goblin let loose among them. And truth to say, their fears for Peverell, as well as their own terrors, seemed likely to be realized.

Overbury looked more like a devil than a human being, when he rushed forth. His face and garments were besmeared with blood; for, groping about in the dark, he had upset the body of Vehan, and fallen with it into the gory stream which had flowed from his wounds. He cared little or nothing about having had such a grisly companion all night; but, believing the affront had been put upon him designedly, he was incensed almost to madness. His first impulse was to aim a desperate, if not a mortal blow, with his sword, at Peverell, who warding it off, though not without receiving a severe cut on his right arm. He repaid this by closing with him, dashing him to the earth, and then planting his foot upon his throat. Overbury, who was stunned by the fall, lay, for a moment, as if he were dead; while they, who looked on at a distance, believing that it was nothing less than a struggle between Peverell and the goblin with the iron hand, when they saw Overbury lying motionless at the feet of the former, raised a loud shout of triumph. Peverell beckoned them to ap-

proach, which they did, though cautiously; and then stooping down to wrest the weapon out of Overbury's hand, which he still held with a firm grasp, he bade them raise him up.

"Are you mad?" he exclaimed, as Overbury opened his eyes, and stared wildly about him. "Else, why this blow?" and he pointed to his arm.

"Mad!" repeated Overbury: "no, nor fool. Hell confound you! say I, an' you dare play your scurvy tricks on me! I am no hilding, to be flouted by you and your sleek companions; no galliass, to be run down by a proud carrack!—Why was I locked into yon place last night?—If you like me not, bid me hence, as men should; and if I do not choose to budge, I'll give you manly cause wherefore. But I'll stab the tallest he among you, and swing for it, ere you shall practise on me thus!"

Overbury who foamed with rage, while he roared out these words, was wrought up to such a pitch of fury, by the recollection of the supposed insult, as well as galled by the manner in which Peverell had thrown and disarmed him, that if he had not been held back, he would certainly, defenceless as he was, have sprung upon Peverell again, who listened calmly to him, while several of his neighbours were engaged in binding a napkin round his wounded arm.

"You are in no condition," said he, "for expostulation, or for receiving the truth of that which happened."

"The truth!" vociferated Overbury: "What can you tell me, more than I know? You cannot tell me I slept in my bed last night."

"But I can tell you why you did not," replied Peverell, in a tone of quiet scorn. "It was because you were drunk, and asleep, before you could get there."

The by-standers laughed at this retort, which Overbury answered only by a look of such collected ferocity, and appalling fierceness, that Peverell himself involuntarily shrunk beneath the almost withering glance of this human fiend.

"Give me my sword," said he: "and let me begone."

Peverell restored his weapon to him, which he sullenly sheathed, while muttering execrations that were but imperfectly heard; and turning upon his heel, swaggered towards his home.

Before Peverell left the spot, he fastened the doors of the Abbey, which he avoided entering, on account of those who were assembled; not wishing that the body of Vehan should become either a spectacle for mere vulgar curiosity, or a topic of popular exaggeration. In his way homewards, he called upon Walwyn, whom he found in much distress of mind, though less so than on the preceding night. He delivered the keys into his custody, that he might be enabled to have the corse of his unhappy kinsman removed; and after mentioning slightly the scene which had occurred between himself and Overbury, he hastened to his own house, where proper dressings were applied to his arm, by Peter Simcox, whom he sent for immediately.



CHAPTER XII.

HELEN was leaning on her father's arm, and walking up and down the terrace, listening anxiously to his account of all the circumstances connected with the death of Vehan, when Robin came bounding along towards them.

"I have a message," said he, with an air of whimsical embarrassment.

"Deliver it, then," said Lacy.

"Ay, but it is for my lady mistress," quoth Robin.

"Then tell it me," replied Helen.

"Ay, but it is for the silent ear of your ladyship's self," added Robin, with an arch expression of countenance.

"Oh—a secret," rejoined Lacy, smiling, "Very well—whisper it discreetly, while I say good morrow to the swans;" and disengaging his arm from Helen, he walked towards a translucent piece of water, on whose surface, floated seven or eight of those birds of proud motion and graceful beauty.

Robin now tripped up to Helen, and with a laughing, roguish eye, half whispered in her ear, "Fitz-Maurice!"

"What of him?" exclaimed Helen, while her cheek grew pale.

"That is all he bade me say," replied Robin, wondering and frightened at the agitation of his mistress.

"Where is he?" added Helen.

"In the yellow tapestry chamber," said Robin, sadly, as if he felt he had committed some fault.

"Enough," replied Helen; "go."

Robin walked away, with a slow and dejected air.

"Has the knave forgotten himself," said Lacy, advancing towards his daughter, and noticing the slow step, and down-cast visage, of poor Robin. "He looks like a rebuked offender. What is it?"

Helen acquainted her father with the communication she had received.

"Fitz-Maurice here!" he exclaimed; "let us in. He is our general: and we serve under him, sworn soldiers of mystery, for three nights to come."

Helen took her father's arm, and they returned towards the house. She was silent and trembling; for she at once dreaded, and desired an interview with Fitz-Maurice.

When they entered the room in which he was, he advanced, took Helen by the hand, and, as he led her to a seat, pressed the finger on which she wore the signet, as if to satisfy himself that it had not been removed.

"It is a noble confidence and fidelity!" he exclaimed, gently, as he bowed to Helen, and quitted her hand.

"You came not last night," said Lacy, addressing Fitz-Maurice.

"But I was with you," he replied.

"With us!" repeated Lacy.

"Even as *I* say," continued Fitz-Maurice, "not as *you* apprehend me."

"You know, then——"

"I would know nothing, now," said Fitz-Maurice, interrupting him, "but whether I may be vouchsafed some half hour's speech with this lady."

Lacy looked at Helen: her eyes met his. They seemed to implore compliance with the request of Fitz-Maurice. He hesitated. A faint flush mantled on his cheek; for a little of the soldier's quick and choleric spirit had been awakened by the abrupt and peremptory manner of Fitz-Maurice; who, perceiving it, took his hand and exclaimed,

"Words are but air. I could frame my entreaty in the picked phrases of a courtier, if I did not know, an honest purpose best avouches itself in the simplicity of its confession. I came to confer with your daughter. Shall I return defeated?"

"No!" replied Lacy; and, erecting himself into an attitude of complacent dignity, (at once satisfied to yield, as a point of courtesy, what he would have refused to petulant command,) he quitted the chamber with a state-ly step.

"You come as I would have you," said Helen, after a pause. "I am grievously afflicted with doubts and fears. You, alone, can resolve the one, and,—if they can be removed,—remove the other. Am I to tell you, or are you cognizant of all that befell me at Margery Ashwell's?"

"Cognizant!" responded Fitz-Maurice.

"Then, speak!—The worst, whate'er of bad must be—the best, whate'er of good can be, to mitigate that worst. I have gone too far, to turn back; not far enough to stop. I could not live a week, oppressed by such dark fancies as now throng about me—tormented by such shadows of the future, as thicken round me. I should grow desperate, and do some deed to make my memory abhorred."

There was a marked change in the manner of Helen. She felt, as she had ever felt, the enthralling influence of Fitz-Maurice's presence; but she now felt, also, that come what might, the burden which weighed her down could be removed or lightened, only by him. And it suited the natural energy of her character, when a difficulty presented itself, susceptible of no choice as to the means of vanquishing it, to embrace, at once, and at every hazard, the single remedy which offered. It was too late to consider how it had been created; it alone remained to her to determine how it could be overcome.

"You have proved the signet's magic power," said Fitz-Maurice.

"I have!" replied Helen; shuddering at the recollection of what had followed.

"But,"—continued Fitz-Maurice, "you have proved it only ONCE."

"Only once!" repeated Helen.

"And *only* once," he proceeded, in the same deep, calm tone, "your startled eyes beheld the diamond words of that crystalline jewel, which Peverell carries now."

"Therein, too," replied Helen, with increasing agitation, "have I been confounded! And, in sooth, I hardly wonder more at what I have seen and heard, than at myself, a fond, weak woman, to find I keep my own counsel, and can bury all in the silent volume of my own heart."

"The million," answered Fitz-Maurice, "might so wonder, in ignorance of what thou art, and judging by the many of the few: but Helen Lacy denies herself, and dishonours Heaven's noblest work, when she thus deems of herself."

"Flattery is a bright summer garment," replied Helen, gravely, "that should be worn with the gawds of fortune: it is too thin and garish, for the dark winter of my condition. Unfold, I pray you, the index of this strange book, on whose mystic leaves is inscribed my sad destiny. I have that within me, which will let me read it."

"You *have* read it!" said Fitz-Maurice. "It was contained in those four-glittering lines!—It lies in those two behests."

"What behests?" asked Helen.

"The signet!—" replied Fitz-Maurice, and he paused.

"I understand," added Helen, thoughtfully. "Farther trials await me! I must revisit that scene of horror—I must again gaze, with an aching sight, and almost frenzied brain, upon those midnight spells—again I must drag from that vexed and tortured spirit, Alascon, what the mightiest of earth's sons could not buy with all their thrones and sovereignties, wanting the farther price which I paid down! Oh! this is terrible."

"This would be terrible," said Fitz-Maurice, "if this were so; but it is not."

"How!" exclaimed Helen; "it is not so?"

"No, gentle maiden! But now hear me.—That which remains undone—*thou* only canst do. For, as the blade which smokes with bloody execution in the shock of battle, would shiver in the hand that wields it, were ~~it not~~ *it* not duly tempered; so thou, called to the issue of this ~~great~~ *great* mystery, would faint beneath it, hadst thou not ~~passed~~ *passed* through the furnace of that fierce ordeal. It was thy ap-

pointed preparation; the test, though you knew it not, by which your fitness to perform the crowning act, was tried; and he who can slay a giant, must, perforce, have sinews to wrestle with a dwarf. The holy love that kindled in your heart its strong desire to know the future—the undaunted spirit which fed that desire—and the heroic fortitude which accomplished it, proclaimed the matchless being, whose ripe qualities for the achievement of a long fore-told triumph, I have sought through many a land. You have said truly. You cannot go back. You cannot stop. What then remains? To advance. But whither, and how far? Two steps!—The first, to aid—the second, to possess—a symbol of inestimable value! I see amazement staring in your eyes. I read there, the conflict of your soul. I read an earnest supplication, too, for words, which I may not utter. No, Helen Lacy! Not even that eloquent, though mute prayer—nor, if that angel look were followed by all the witchery of woman's tongue, sanctified, as here it would be, by all the holiest of woman's virtues, could I, DARE I, breathe, what your distracted heart pants to hear! For this is now your only trial. It is now only demanded of you, (to fulfil what is begun,) that you have SILENT FAITH, and an unshaken, an unassailable resolution. Believe that what you are to do, is good; and then, shrink not from the doing. Remember the portentous replications of Alascon;—remember the mighty triumph, or the unutterable misery, that is suspended on *your* will;—remember of whom it was prophesied, that he should win the triumph,—Even he, who won you! I conjure you, then——”

“Stop!” exclaimed Helen, in a voice convulsed with agitation—“or bid me remember, also, the horrid condition that was attached.—Blood!—more blood must be shed!—ay, and shed by the hand to which it is most precious! Bid me remember, too, those frightful visions of the mystic glass, when I grew frantic, and dashed myself to earth, that I might see no more! What is it you would have me do, thou man of mystery?—The vulture grew to likeness of myself!—Am I to play the human vulture? To drink the life-blood of my father,—even at its sacred fount—That heart which has been my sanctuary; which has never known a feeling towards me that was not gentle, kind, and loving? Oh, God! deliver me, in thy

mercy, from this sharp trial, or mine own heart will surely break!"

Helen wept in agony. Fitz-Maurice gazed upon her in silence; but with a troubled spirit. When her grief abated, he spoke.

"Why this sorrow?" said he. "What though your hand were on a cup, drugged with deadliest poison? Still, if there were no power to make you drain it, you might look upon the mortal draught with an undisturbed brow. So reason this matter. You apprehend a deed of horror. But there is no malignant planet which over-rules your will. Say you cannot banish these sick fancies of your brain—that this dream of a heated imagination pursues you? The worst that can befall thee, is to groan a little longer under its harrowing influence: for you are as free, as the eagle in his mountain home, who cleaves the air above their highest tops, the monarch of illimitable space! But *can* you rest upon the wing? Having taken your daring flight, *can* you hover, beneath the clouds, through which you must pass to find a resting place, and watch till they disperse? For so *you* must do, if here you pause. And forget not, that though *you* pause, others do not; that whatever is to be, will be; and that all the consolation which may await you, will be to know, not that you *have* arrested, in its course, the dark tide of human misery,—but that you *might*!"

"Spare me," ejaculated Helen. "I am tottering on the brink of a dismal abyss, darkling and alone; and need thy friendly hand to guide me from it; not thy deluding voice to beguile me onward!"

Fitz-Maurice rose, and approaching Helen, leaned in a careless but graceful attitude against the chair in which she was seated. Her heart beat quicker, and her bosom heaved with undefined emotions at this sudden and unexpected movement of Fitz-Maurice; but she did not withdraw her face from the handkerchief, bathed with her tears, in which she had buried it.

"If,"—said he, in a deep, thrilling tone, "if there were in this world a being who, for more years than ~~he~~ was permitted to tell, had languished in captivity—if his chains were forged by no human hand, rivetted by no human power—if his dungeon walls were not of stone, ~~nor~~ of brass, nor ribbed with iron—if his doom were ~~such~~,

that no natural tear could ever gather in his sleep-forbiddén eyes—no bursting sigh could ever discharge the grief that clung to his long-withering heart—if, for him, the seasons had no change, and time itself stood still—if the fresh spring gladdened not *his* cheek—the warm and glorious sun of summer, glowed not in *his* veins—the temperate autumn, with its delicious western gale, fanned not *his* brow—nor icy winter drove *him* to the festal board, and social hearth—if there were one so lone, so blighted, on this fair earth, who, kneeling at your feet, should say, in trembling hope, and suppliant agony, strike off my fetters, for thou canst—throw wide my prison doors—for thou hast the key in thy hands—could you spurn him from you?”

Helen raised her eyes. Fitz-Maurice had fallen on one knee; and she saw him in the very attitude, and with the same imploring look that she had beheld in the charmed mirror of Alascon! Before she could speak, or hardly recall her-bewildered thoughts, the door burst open, and Mephosto stood before them. Helen gazed with terror upon his hideous aspect and menacing look.

“Rise!” he exclaimed.

“The hour?” said Fitz-Maurice.

“The sun is hot upon my cheek!” answered Mephosto.

“Slave, thou liest!” replied Fitz-Maurice. “This is thy malignant spite.”

“Ha!” said the dwarfish fiend, “then is thy doom come! I bid thee once! Hark! thy charger neighs in answer;” and he crawled nearer to Fitz-Maurice.

“There must be time for the screech-owl to cry thrice ere thou bid me again,” answered Fitz-Maurice. Then turning to Helen, with a wild and frantic look, he added, “Oh, lady! Fail me now, and fail me ever!”

“Rise! I bid you twice!” croaked forth Mephosto, as he dragged himself closer to the still kneeling Fitz-Maurice, while he drew his jewel-hilted dagger, and looked at Helen with a terrific glance. “Hark! your courser churns the bit with a foaming mouth!”

“He must to his crib, i’ the centre of the earth, and beat his brain, and bring thy dagger’s point envenomed, ere thou bid me thrice!” exclaimed Fitz-Maurice, with a hoarse voice. Then, once more turning to Helen, he

seized her hand, pointed to the signet, and, in accents hardly articulate, "Command him, as thou didst Alascon," said he, "or see me perish!"

Helen scarcely understood him; but she saw the blade of Mephosto's dagger kindle at the point into what appeared a flame of blood. He had raised it aloft—his eyes flashed fire—the chamber shook beneath him—and his hand was upon Fitz-Maurice, whose face grew livid and convulsed.

"Rise!" roared Mephosto, in a voice of thunder. "I have called you ONCE—I have called you TWICE—I call you——"

Helen tore off her glove, and stretching forth her hand, exclaimed, with a kind of hysterical laugh, "I COMMAND thee, OBEY THE SIGNET!"

A loud yell followed from Mephosto. He crawled away. In a moment after, the clattering of horses' feet was heard without, and Fitz-Maurice, springing up, caught Helen in his arms, as she swooned from the excessive agitation of her feelings.

Helen soon recovered, and when she opened her eyes, she saw Fitz-Maurice standing by her side, contemplating her with a look full of deep devotion, while, at the same time, his features were lighted up with an intense expression of conscious satisfaction. She could plainly read what were his emotions that moment: fervent gratitude, and new-born hope! His hair, which clustered in profusion over his forehead, had slightly parted, and she beheld, for the first time, the crimson wound which marked his brow. Its colour seemed to come and go, changing each instant from a pale to a vivid red, as if it followed the throbbing motion of his blood. Fitz-Maurice observed the direction of her eyes, and gently drew his hair together, so as to cover his forehead.

"What am I to understand," said Helen, "from that which I have witnessed? What, from that which I have heard? Can you not now unfold the sequel? It would seem," she continued, looking at the signet, "that, almost without knowing how, I have performed one of those two behests you spoke of. What is the other—and what will it achieve? Alas! I sought the fatal knowledge I possess, to save a father—must I employ it only to——?"

"Save the tears of future orphans? to stay the havoc

which blood cannot satiate? to purchase eternal life among the holiest of the saints of heaven? and to snatch, from the dominion of hell, a symbol of righteousness?" interrupted Fitz-Maurice.

If these things could be," replied Helen, "and if so unworthy, so weak and so frail a creature as myself, could be their instrument, yet surely it would be appointed I should work by more hallowed means. What, if I am in the toils of the arch-fiend, and blindly executing his will, to the everlasting perdition of my most precious soul? Oh! one thought of that would mad me quite!"

"I repeat," said Fitz-Maurice, "that you must have silent faith, and an unshaken resolution, to fulfil what you have begun."

"On what must that faith rest?" inquired Helen.

"On this!" exclaimed Fitz-Maurice, with an awful solemnity of manner, drawing aside his hair, and pointing to the burning cross, which seemed, at that moment to glow like living fire upon his brow.

"Mysterious being!" said Helen, "What art thou?"

"Mortal, like thyself!" he answered. "An undaunted soldier of Christ; one who hath kissed the true sepulchre—and been ordained its knight, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; but whose wondrous and accursed destiny, since, for years he may not number, hath withered all human sympathies and affections within him, till now, he stands before thee, a blasted form of what he was! More than this I am forbidden to tell: nor could my tongue have uttered what it hath, hadst thou not commanded hence, by that signet's mighty potency, (whereat thou well may'st marvel,) the abhorred thing which called me. That act struck off one galling link of the chain that holds me to my fate: a fate, hopeless and irrevocable, till I shall have found what all my reviving hopes tell me, exists in THEE! I have long pursued, but never came so near, as now, the performance of the hard and ruthless conditions, which must restore me to myself. Oh, lady! Gentle pity, and soft compassion, build their throne of tears and sighs, in woman's yielding heart. She is Mercy's handmaid; and through her lips breathe peace and consolation to the bruised spirits of this world. One deed of heavenly

goodness more; one closing trial of your faith—one last display of dauntless courage—and a wretch—a very wretch, whose single hour of anguish might out-number the groans of a mortal life of suffering, would kiss the dust beneath your feet. Yes! Helen Lacy! THOU ART THE WOMAN! By that age of torment I have endured, which language cannot shadow forth—by that present agony which tears my soul—by that tremendous future which lies howling before me—by this burning witness of the truth, which now scalds my brain,—by all that man can urge, or God inspire, I adjure thee, be faithful to the last, and redeem me from my captivity!”

“How?” said Helen, while she gazed upon him with awe and terror, for his voice and figure, and manner, seemed more than mortal.

“How!” exclaimed Fitz-Maurice; “by the signet’s power.”

“Where and when?” inquired Helen.

“The Abbey—to-morrow night!” replied Fitz-Maurice.

“The Abbey!”

“Ay, the Abbey!” continued Fitz-Maurice. “Why comes that cloud across thy brow? Hear me. If when the chimes go twelve to-morrow night, thou, attired like a bride, in virgin white, veiled; and with that ring upon thy wedding finger, strike thrice upon the Abbey door, and at each stroke exclaim, ‘Husband, come, the cross is mine,’ the portal straight shall open. Then enter. Speak not, whate’er thou seest. But, advancing to the altar, stand beneath it, and casting back thy veil, take off the signet. Place it on the altar, kneel, and pray in these words, ‘*Forgive me: I know not what I do, but thy will be mine.*’ Then rise; place the signet again upon thy finger, and raising it to Heaven exclaim, ‘*I command thee, obey!*’ What is to follow, it were the forfeiture of all to tell; but mark, this must you do in silent faith—no ear must hear, no heart must know, thy intents. And if this you can do—if this you will do,—if no terror of what you behold, appal you,—if no dread beset you, when prayers, and threats, and imprecations assail you, the triumph is complete!”

Fitz-Maurice paused. Helen sat pale and trembling. In imagination, she was already performing the frightful

task assigned her, when suddenly she started up, and shrieking aloud, exclaimed—"But my father,—oh, my father! what of him?"

"Is it a vision that troubles you?" said Fitz-Maurice.

"No, no," replied Helen, weeping. "Memory, too faithful to its office, brings before my fancy the wizard mirror of Alascon. Blood that is precious to the hand which sheds it, must flow ere this triumph is achieved; and what blood on earth so precious as that which I have endured all this to spare?"

"Then you deny me!" said Fitz-Maurice.

"I do not," answered Helen; "but I am almost mad. Husband! what husband?—He is my husband, lover, father, all! Whom do I demand, when I bid my husband come? Away—you mock me to undo me!"

"Then you deny me!" repeated Fitz-Maurice.

"My bridal dress, alas! should be my winding sheet; my bridal bed, my coffin; death, grim, bony death, my husband! Oh! how I could wind my arms round his rattling bones, and sink to rest upon my pillow of worms!"

"Then you deny me!" still repeated Fitz-Maurice, but in a tone of voice unlike any which Helen had heard from him. She looked at him. He fixed his eyes wildly upon her.

"Can I be satisfied," said she, "that the living grave I dig thee from, shall not be my father's sepulchre?"

The door opened, and Mephosto entered again. He spoke not; but, with his hand, silently beckoned Fitz-Maurice to follow.

"I come!" said he.

Helen threw herself into a chair and wept aloud.

Mephosto beckoned.

"I come!" repeated Fitz-Maurice. He seized the hand of Helen; she raised her eyes towards him, swimming in tears. "Peerless maiden!" he exclaimed,—
"Bride of Christ!—dost thou deny me? Speak! For my fate calls me hence."

Mephosto beckoned once more, and stamped violently on the ground.

"Say NO!" exclaimed Fitz-Maurice, "or I am lost."

A loud laugh burst from Mephosto.

"No!" cried Helen, faintly, and sunk back in her chair.

"Angel of life!" ejaculated Fitz-Maurice, and hurried out of the room. Helen, though hardly conscious of any thing, heard the departing tramp of his courser's feet, and only felt that a terrible scene was over.

In a few minutes, she rallied her distracted thoughts sufficiently to hasten to her own chamber. She was most anxious to do so, lest her father, knowing she was alone, should seek an interview with her, which she was utterly incapable of sustaining.



CHAPTER XIII.

At seven o'clock, De Clare, Mortimer, Peverell, and the rest, met at Lacy's. Overbury was among them, having learned from Hungerford Hoskyns the hour that had been appointed. His look and manner indicated that the circumstance of the preceding night still rankled in his mind; but, as it was known only to Peverell and Walwyn, that he had actually been locked in, the others were at a loss to account for his more than ordinary fierce, yet sullen deportment. There had been no time for explanation, when De Clare, addressing Peverell, inquired what accident had befallen him, seeing he carried his arm in a sling. The latter, not caring to revive the occurrence of the morning, by describing how he had received his wound, answered, carelessly, that it was a mere trifle which he would take another opportunity of mentioning.

The conversation then turned upon the murder of mine host, the news of which had, of course, spread rapidly throughout the town; when De Clare informed them that he had called upon his worship, not half an hour since, and no tidings had then been received of the assassin. The event was considered by all of them as no less extraordinary than lamentable, on account of the apparent absence of all the usual incentives to such a deed. Neither plunder, nor revenge, seemed to have instigated the murderer; and why, therefore, he had committed the crime at all, was pronounced wholly inexplicable.

"But that is not the only inexplicable part of the business," observed Peverell; "for I learn that the body of his father, which was placed in the charnel house, has been removed. The coffin was found empty, this afternoon, when the person went thither to convey it to the church-yard for interment. I can easily believe, however, that his son removed it, before he fled; for the door was not locked."

"But to what purpose?" said Lacy.

"That I cannot tell," replied Peverell.—"But, when I recall his extraordinary history of himself, and the terrific picture he drew of those three days and nights, during which, he sat by his wretched father, to see him die, I can conceive many motives calculated to influence such a being, which I should discard in my estimate of any other man's reasons for whatever he might do. It is likely enough, that, in the wild suggestions of his mind, he either dug a road-side grave for his father's bones, or, has borne them, perhaps, to some dark and obscure spot, there to lie beside them, and await the slow death of famine himself. Either of these methods of disposing of the miserably wasted remains, would be quite consistent with his moody character. Depend upon it, he will not be taken alive; for, if it had been his intention to be so found, he would have been. Whatever cause he had to destroy that poor man, (and there appears no reasonable ground to doubt the fact of his being the murderer,) he would have abided, voluntarily, his own justification of it, if he had not resolved, before hand, upon the means to defy justice. It is my firm opinion, I confess, either that he will never be discovered, or, that at some future day, his bones will be found whitening by the side of his father's in some pathless glen or solitary cave."

"I think you are right," said De Clare, "but we shall miss mine host to-night. His jovial face, and ever merry eye, which still laughed in spite of his sometimes quaking heart, were the best antidotes to melancholy I e'er looked upon."

"By my faith," exclaimed Mortimer, "talking of poor Jack Wintour, quickens my dull memory. Friend Overbury, where did you sleep last night?"

"Where you did not," replied Overbury, sullenly,

"and where, had you, you would have given your trim mustachios to be away."

"You say truly," retorted Mortimer; "for, to sleep where you did, I must have had you for a bed-fellow, and I would have offered my head as well as my mustachios, to be excused so unsavoury a companion. But impart: how was it? We despatched our departed host of *The Rose* to look for you, and you were gone."

"Indeed we did, mark you," added Owen Rees, "and he vociferated three times; but you answered not, mark you, as one gentleman should when another calls him."

"He burns in hell, for that lie!" exclaimed Overbury, "an' he said so."

"It was no lie, Mister Overbury, mark you," replied Owen, "if you did not answer; and if you were not in the Abbey—as Heaven forbid you were, for it was a lack-comfort bed—why, then, mark you, how could you answer, Mister Overbury?"

"What is it you mean?" said Overbury, furiously.—"Am I here to be baited? If so, let me see the man among you, who will step forth and begin the sport! Hell's torments be my portion, if I do not cleave to the chine, the gibing fool that does it, though all your swords were hilted in me the next moment! The fire of hell blister your glib tongues, an' their frothy quips gird at me! Is it not enough that your baboon's tricks have prospered? I have faced danger on the salt sea, and looked to find my grave a hundred fathom beneath its foam, too long to be frightened now by the cawing of such choughs."

Peverell here interposed, and related what had taken place between himself and Overbury; observing, in conclusion, that his crippled arm bore testimony to the angry feelings which the accident had provoked.

"Accident!" muttered Overbury. "Such accidents happen always, when men play the boy, and blubber for the mischief they dare not confess as such."

"Thou art tongue-valiant," said Mortimer, stepping close to Overbury, with his hand upon his sword, "but nothing more with honest men. I tell thee, to thy teeth, that thou wert drunk last night; that, in thy drunkenness, thou sleptst; that, in thy sleep, we missed thee; that, missing thee, we sought thee; that, seeking thee, we did

thee a kinder office than thy brutish quality deserved; and now, deny this to my teeth, if thou darst, thou sea-monster!"

"And when thou hast done so," added the little Welshman, strutting fiercely up to Overbury, "call me mountain goat, again—Wilfrid Overbury, some time master of the *Scorpion*!"

Overbury's cheek turned pale, at the mention of the *Scorpion*, and he looked at Owen Rees as if he would read in his face, whether he had a meaning beyond the mere repetition of words that had been used by Fitz-Maurice.

"I do not deny the drink," said he; "but it was an ungracious trick to leave me with that bloody man in that dark, cold place. I rolled upon him, and we fell; and thinking it was—I know not what—I stabbed him thrice as he lay beneath me, ere I remembered what had happened. It was an ungracious trick, I say, to leave me thus."

Walwyn was much affected by this declaration of Overbury, and uttered some half-stifled exclamation of distress. Every one present, indeed, felt shocked, no less at the churlish apathy with which he described the horrid indignity offered to the body of Vehan, than at the idea of the hideous scuffle, which their imaginations at once pictured, with such a ruffian as Overbury; who fancied he was butchering an opponent, instead of striking at a corse.

A pause of several minutes ensued, which De Clare at length interrupted, by inquiring at what hour they should proceed to the Abbey, and whether they were to see Fitz-Maurice that night. Peverell proposed nine o'clock; but with regard to Fitz-Maurice, he could say nothing, for he had not seen him since he was last present among them all. Lacy mentioned that he had been with him that day.

"Again *here*!" exclaimed Peverell. "And what said he?"

"To me, nothing," replied Lacy, "for he came to have an interview with my daughter; and what passed, I have not heard."

"An interview with your daughter," said Peverell, musing.

"He'll woo her, by my faith!" observed Mortimer.

"As the lion would woo the hind," replied De Clare, or the eagle the dove! His character, truly, is formed to win woman's love; but it will be, when the wolf and the lamb browse the same herbage, or summer roses blow at Christmas."

"He is no amorous gallant, certainly," said Lacy; "but this is the second time he has visited Helen."

"Look to it!" responded Mortimer: "look to it, my friend! I do not say your daughter will fall from her duty; but I do say that a woman will sometimes fall, like snow in June, most strangely, and when men expect it not."

"If your experience have taught you so much," replied De Clare, "I am converted; but, inasmuch as you are yet a bachelor, I hold to my opinion."

"Which is ——" said Mortimer.

"That women have eyes," answered De Clare, "and do not choose husbands, as the mole works—without them."

"Your experience," retorted Mortimer, "has taught you so much; and there be more in this good company, or I am at fault, who could supply you with as good proof of your theory as myself. But to matters of more grave import. Might it not be well to inquire of the Lady Helen, whether Fitz-Maurice expressed his intention, or otherwise, of being with us?"

This suggestion was immediately acted upon by Lacy, who despatched a servant to Helen; but the answer returned by her was, that Fitz-Maurice had not intimated any thing on the subject.

"Then he will not come," said De Clare; "which surprises me, considering his absence last night."

"He told me," replied Lacy, "and it was all he did tell me, that he *was* with us last night."

"With us!" exclaimed Peverell.

"That was my very question," continued Lacy, "and his answer was—'even as *I* say—not as *you* apprehend.'"

"I protest," observed Mortimer, "I wish I could make out this two-legged riddle—this living mystery—this Fitz-Maurice, as he calls himself."

"His stream runs too deep for thy line," said De Clare.

"Or for any of our lines, I think," added Lacy. "He is like a well-defended fortress, unapproachable either by sudden attack, or secret mining."

"Why do you waste your breath so idly?" exclaimed Overbury. "You have all bound yourselves to him for three more nights of servitude, and be he man or be he devil, you are so long his. I am free, it is true; but it is my humour, now, to see the end. Besides, I have a matter to settle with him ere we part for aye."

The intrusion of Overbury's sentiments put an end to the conversation on this subject, for every one abstained from replying to him; and during the rest of the time, their discourse was chiefly with Walwyn, whose dejection was extreme. He had not once opened his lips, but sat in gloomy silence, brooding over the sad fate which had befallen his kinsman. The circumstance mentioned by Overbury had added much to the poignancy of his feelings.

They endeavoured to withdraw him from his melancholy reflections: but it was evident the blow had fallen heavily upon him. In spite of every remonstrance, of every argument, or persuasion, he accused himself as the rash murderer of Vehan, whose memory he now seemed to idolize with that passionate grief which magnifies what it mourns by its own estimate, rather than by the value reason assigns. It is one advantage, however, of such grief, that if its pangs be sharp, they are brief: for, as the sorrow wears away, its estimate diminishes; while the more severe privation, over which our reason mourns, endures till the mind itself decays.

In the midst of this various conversation, the time arrived for proceeding to the Abbey, and they quitted Lacy's house. But they had scarcely reached the place, when they were surprised by the sound of horses' feet rapidly approaching; and, before the doors were unlocked, Fitz-Maurice, followed by Mephosto, halted in the midst of them. Fitz-Maurice, as usual, instantly alighted, and the next moment, Mephosto was off at the same furious rate.

"We knew not of your coming," said De Clare, "and had ceased to expect you."

"I knew of yours," replied Fitz-Maurice, "and came. I have business to do to-night."

They entered the Abbey, and, advancing to the table, took their seats. Fitz-Maurice occupied the same place as on the first night. Peverell and Lacy were on each side of him; De Clare at the opposite end of the table; and the rest were ranged all on one side. Overbury, therefore, sat entirely alone. His deportment was less boisterous than on the preceding night; but, he had no sooner seated himself, than he filled out a cup of wine, which he immediately drank off.



CHAPTER XIV.

PEVERELL related to Fitz-Maurice the tragical incident of Vehan's death, with all the circumstances which preceded and accompanied it. Fitz-Maurice listened with seeming attention; but there was an evident expression of gladness in his eye, as he turned it upon Walwyn, when Peverell mentioned how deep was his affliction for the untoward event.

"He was his friend?" said Fitz-Maurice.

"He was more," replied Peverell, "for he was his well beloved kinsman, too."

Fitz-Maurice made no answer; and Peverell went on to state the extraordinary occurrence of Wintour's murder, prefacing it with a brief account of the singular history of the Venetian youth, his supposed murderer. Fitz-Maurice appeared less attentive to this than he had been to what concerned Vehan; and, when Peverell ceased, it was manifest that he had sunk into a profound abstraction.

The presence of Fitz-Maurice, his mysterious air, his silence, and the restless glances which he ever and anon cast round the Abbey, tended, in conjunction with their own recollection of past, and their anticipation of future events, to diffuse a more than ordinary gloom. Overbury was the only one who seemed insensible to this feeling. He did not speak; but he drained cup after cup of wine, as if he were drinking himself up to some required pitch

of excitement. Occasionally, he directed his looks towards Fitz-Maurice; but if, by chance, their eyes met, he withdrew his with marked perturbation; his cheeks became flushed, and he eagerly sought to hide his confusion, by renewing his potations.

They had remained thus for nearly an hour, when a thundering knock was heard at the door, which resounded in doubling echoes through the lofty aisles. They all started round, and Overbury sprung upon his feet. Fitz-Maurice was motionless. Before any one could speak, the knock was repeated, but much louder. They all rose, except Fitz-Maurice, who betrayed, neither by look nor gesture, the slightest participation in their amazement. A third time the knock was heard, and the solid foundations of the Abbey shook beneath their feet. Every eye was turned towards Fitz-Maurice, who still sat motionless and silent.

“What may this mean?” exclaimed De Clare.

The doors opened, and Mephosto entered. They could not at first distinguish him, through the deep gloom of the farther extremity; but they heard the patting of his broad feet along the stone pavement. At length his form became visible, as he moved to where Fitz-Maurice was seated. When he was within a yard or two of him, he fell upon his face, and grovelled along the ground like a whipped spaniel.

“Am I obeyed?” said Fitz-Maurice.

“It is done,” replied Mephosto.

“Enough,” answered Fitz-Maurice. “Be watchful as the lynx. Hence!”

The dwarf retired, for some paces, in the same prostrate attitude, and then raising himself upon his feet, he crawled slowly out of the Abbey.

They beheld this scene with dumb surprise; and when they heard the doors close, resumed their seats in silence.

“It has not been always thus,” said Fitz-Maurice, addressing Lacy; “and would not be so now, but for thee and thine.”

“I do not understand you,” replied Lacy.

“When the gray dawn first streaks the eastern clouds,” answered Fitz-Maurice, “the benighted traveller rejoices, but he sees not the landscape that lies before him. By imperceptible degrees, its fresh and dewy love-

liness grows into form and beauty; anon, the gorgeous sun, in rising glory, flings his golden beams upon the earth, and hill, and valley, the woodland and the verdant plain, the deep river, and the gushing mountain stream, are all revealed. Then steps he cheerily onward, and straight forgets the o'erpast perils of the dark night. Even so, I say, hath it been with each of ye. But your dawn is at hand; your hour of sunrise approaches, when you shall no longer ask, whither is it we go?"

"There is not, I believe, a flinching spirit among us," said De Clare; "for, when last we renewed our compact with you, it was with the resolved hearts of men self-devoted to the worst."

"But still with such distrust of one another," added Overbury, "that, like a band of rogues, engaged to rob or murder, you must be sworn, to hang together. Now, I——"

"Prefer to hang alone," added Mortimer; "and I protest I not only commend thy choice, but languish for the performance of it."

"And when I do," vociferated Overbury, it will be in a fit of the spleen, to think that thou canst be hanged only once, an' the rope break not."

"Which it will not do, when thou art hanged, my master of the Scorpion," retorted Mortimer; "for the devil will have the twisting of thy rope; and, 'tis his pride to have his own children well hung."

"Why, there again you would mock me," exclaimed Overbury, valiant with wine. "*Master of the Scorpion!* What can you say or——"

"I," interrupted Fitz-Maurice, fixing his eyes upon him; "but that your vessel, on your homeward voyage, struck upon the Goodwin Sands, and *all* the crew perished. The ship went down. You buffeted the waves, a golden treasure girded round your waist, and gained the beach. A good old man, with warm and generous cordials, brought you back to life, led you to his lonely habitation, gave you shelter, food, and clothing; which you requited from the store you had saved, and left him."

"I did," said Overbury, "and he was thankful."

"As thou wast," added Fitz-Maurice, "when you found that *YOU ALONE* were saved!"

"I—I,—grieved bitterly," stammered forth Overbury, utterly confounded by what he had heard.

"Peace!" exclaimed Fitz-Maurice, in a tone of stern command. "I promised you, erewhile, farther satisfaction. You shall have it. Behold!"

Overbury sat like one spell-bound. Except that his eyes moved, and his broad chest heaved with a quick and labouring respiration, he seemed a statue, so fixed was his attitude, so bloodless his cheeks, so marble his look. There was a visible consternation, too, on the countenances of all save Fitz-Maurice, whose features underwent not the slightest change.

While thus wrapped in suspense as to what would ensue, Fitz-Maurice took from his neck a gold chain, to which was appended a Jerusalem cross, and kissing it thrice, he exclaimed each time, "Appear!"

"At the third command they heard a noise like that of a swift stream, running over a loose pebbly bed; and then they saw a steaming vapour slowly ascend from the ground, which, as it grew in bulk, spread from wall to wall, filling the whole space of the Abbey, except where they sat. It gradually assumed the appearance of the green ocean; the waves gently undulated; and upon their scarcely rippled surface fell a soft pale light, like the moon-beams. Presently, the perfect image of a ship, becalmed, its sails idly flapping in the wind as it died away, swelled into shape.

"Now pause: and, anon, follow my words!" exclaimed Fitz-Maurice.

The wondrous scene remained. It was so marvellously the counterpart of reality, that they almost fancied they felt the freshness of the ocean breeze play upon their cheeks.

"Such was the night, its serene beauty such," said Fitz-Maurice, "when, some six years since, a vessel like the one you see, lay becalmed on the silver-seeming waves that wash Sicilia's shore. How unlike the peaceful scene without, was the foul act of lust and blood that passed within! A man, whose past deeds were written in the blackest page of human crime—whose already perjured soul was stained with guilt beyond the wrath of Heaven to forgive; who had rifled the poor—slain the innocent—beggared the friend who trusted him—plundered

the rich—violated the sanctuary—and cut the throat of the priest on his own altar—plucked buried jewels from the dead, and ripped the matron's womb in bloody scoff, to teach a pirate's midwifery,—this man, so steeped in villany as I have charactered him, was MASTER of the ship. As if he had meditated solely how he might do a deed, to outdo the dark catalogue of those he had committed, his devilish spirit engendered one, so monstrous, that, in all hell there groans no soul doomed to its penal fires for such another! E'en as a noble sire may see himself dishonoured in his sons, so, a degenerate one shall give goodly fruit, which smacks not of the rank soil that produced it. Look at that form of innocence and beauty, and wonder, as ye may, how from a source so foul and loathsome, a creature thus rare and perfect could have sprung. She was his daughter."

At this moment, the bright shadow of a female started into life as it were, upon the deck of the phantom vessel.

She appeared in the act of offering up her evening orisons, and her parted lips seemed to move, while a saint-like expression dwelt upon her young, but pensive features. Her limbs were moulded in the finest proportions, and an air of graceful modesty clothed her with bewitching loveliness. A loud groan burst from Overbury as this vision gradually melted away.

"The fair GONDOLINE," continued Fitz-Maurice, "perished that night! The ravening monster of the deep stole upon her slumbers, and the shrieking virgin found herself in the hot grasp of a ravisher. Wild prayers and streaming curses fall from her lips—supplicating tears gush from her eyes—with frenzied strength she struggles—with piteous accents she implores—and then, in choking agony, calls upon her father! Happy had she died at that moment in blessed ignorance! Alas! she lived to know the caitiff. IT WAS HER FATHER! Yes,—the spoiler was betrayed, though shrouded in darkness. Despair and horror seized him; and he who shrunk not from the damned commission of his unhallowed crime, now stood aghast at the thought of one withering glance from the maniac eyes of his violated daughter. She was mad!—her delirious screams of father! father! seared his brain, and rang his soul's knell of everlasting perdition! This demon-lecher, who could have lived and smiled again,

self-pardoned in his own pernicious heart, if his own heart were all that quailed him, could *not* live to brave an outraged world. What then? Did he smite himself, and so appease the justice of this world, and invoke eternal judgment in the next? Behold, how, for a time, his recreant nature absolved itself from both."

When Fitz-Maurice uttered these words, the phantasm upon which they gazed underwent a horrible change. What had, hitherto, appeared the calm green wave of the ocean, now heaved and rolled, a sea of blood: and on its troubled surface seemed to lie the form of *GONDOLINE*, ghastly and distorted—her flowing, auburn hair, dishevelled; her garments rent—and her fair bosom gashed with deep wounds, which looked as though they still bled. The scene grew dark—the vessel blackened in the gloom; and a dismal cry swept along the waters, as the figure of *GONDOLINE* slowly sunk beneath them, deepening, in its descent, their crimson hue. The next moment, the darkness gradually disappeared; the waves rippled, as if a rising breeze began to curl their foaming tops; they broke, in dancing surges, against the side of the ship, whose lately pendent sails now filled with the wind, the brightness of the sun, succeeded to what had been the likeness of the soft, pale moonlight; and the tossing waves played in his beams, like a floor of sparkling emeralds. The ship moved. It wore round. And as its stern seemed to heave in sight, "*THE SCORPION, WILFRID OVERBURY, MASTER,*" appeared, painted in large white letters upon a black ground!

Overbury had hitherto sat silent—gazing, like the rest, upon the necromantic illusion; but, unlike the rest, a prey to tortures, which no language may describe. His swart and disfigured face was bathed with perspiration, which ran from him in streams: his teeth gnashed: his eyes were starting from their sockets: his breathing was short and convulsive; and as the varying torments of his awakened conscience started into visible existence upon his agitated frame and features,—now shrinking within himself—now grinning, as if in more than human scorn of that abhorrence which he felt was kindling round him—then grasping the table with a sort of frantic clutching of his half-clenched hands—he exhibited an appalling image of a guilty wretch, whose long life of dark and desperate crime,

was suddenly unveiled, and placed in terrible array before him.

When, however, the vision had thus awfully pronounced "THOU ART THE MAN!" he could no longer command his maddened feelings, but, starting up and drawing his sword, he rushed towards Fitz-Maurice like a chafed tiger, roaring out, "Fiend! devil!—have at thy throat, hell-dog, an' thou canst be strangled!"

He staggered—reeled—fell—rolled for a moment on the ground in contortions of the most violent agony—raised himself on his knees—gazed wildly round—saw the spectre of his murdered daughter, rising from the bosom of the once more becalmed sea, apparelled in glory, like an angel, and ascending to the clouds: then, with horrid imprecations, which burst from him in loud yells, rather than in human accents, fell back and lay motionless.

At that moment, the scene of enchantment vanished! Howling and laughing were heard without; the doors flew open; Mephosto entered—he crawled towards the body of Overbury, seized it by the throat, and with the same ease that he would have thrown his mantle round him, flung it over his shoulder, and carried it out of the Abbey.



CHAPTER XV.

DURING the whole of these marvellous and mysterious proceedings, Fitz-Maurice maintained a dignified self-possession. Not the slightest perturbation was perceptible, even when the infuriate Overbury sprung from his seat, and rushed towards him. He looked at him, as a superior being might be supposed to do; conscious that he was invulnerable, or secure in his certain knowledge of what was to happen. The rest, though agitated by a variety of emotions, were but mute spectators of all that passed.

"This, at least, is no mystery," said Fitz-Maurice after a silence of several minutes. "The eternal God nor punishes, nor blesses at once, but by degrees, and by warn-

ings. He hath promised his mercy to them that be truly repentant although it be at their latter end; but he hath not promised to the presumptuous sinner, either that he shall have long life, or true repentance at the last end: therefore, hath he made every man's death uncertain. Herein have I executed the will of Heaven—not by special mission, for I am unworthy: but that in my knowledge of that man's crimes, I had the will and power thus to punish him. Marvel not, therefore, at what thou hast beheld. Of the wretched, he was most wretched; for there are none so wretched as they who have a conscience seared. Such a man builds a wall at his back; he cannot, if he would, return."

"To show us what you have," replied De Clare, "and bid us not wonder, is as incongruous, as it would be to place us on the rack, and say, 'be merry.' But, if ever the wish to inquire could be stifled by the use of that which doth stir inquiry, it would be when such a demi-devil was blotted out of existence."

"He was, indeed, an incomparable villain," observed Walwyn.

"Why, the deeds of his single life," said Peverell, "were sufficient to furnish the calendar of crimes for a whole century of a well regulated state."

"I protest, in all sincerity," said Mortimer, "I gave him the benefit of as much villany as my ripe conceptions of sin would let me: but his performances outstript my most liberal allowance. He was the devil's abridgment—Lucifer's copy in little—by my faith, a very incarnation of Beelzebub!"

"It surprises me now," added De Clare, "that crossing him as we did, we escaped his secret but swift revenge. He was one of those bravos, whom I should have guessed no one that was weary of life, would have a difference with, and walk abroad after day-light."

"Except," observed Lacy, "that you ever find cowardice mated with cruelty."

"Seeing what I have, mark you," said Owen Rees, "I account myself the richer in honour, by so much honour, as I should have lost, mark you, had I enforced satisfaction for the affront he put upon me. But, it is better, sometimes, to have a knave's contumely than his blood. Well—well—may heaven forgive him all his other of-

fences as I do, mark you, his having called me a mountain goat—mark you!”

“I hope,” observed Hungerford Hoskyns, “the gentleman who has taken charge of our late friend, will see that he has Christian burial.”

“It is a sorry jest,” replied Fitz-Maurice, with an air of serious displeasure, “that lies in the profaning of things sacred; as it was a miserable valour, in him you speak of, to dare the Almighty. We are brethren, for nobler and better purposes. I am here to-night to show you with what instruments Heaven vouchsafes to work. To-morrow night, if the faith that is plighted, be ransomed, I shall be here to achieve the consummation of all!”

“To-morrow night!” exclaimed Peverell.

“Even so,” replied Fitz-Maurice.

“To-morrow night, then!” repeated Peverell, in a half whisper to himself, “will be the consummation of all!”

“Of all!” said Fitz-Maurice. “Have you any doubts?”

“None,” answered Peverell, calmly; “you have said so, and it is enough. But what afterwards?”

Fitz-Maurice made no reply—Peverell started. A voice at that moment breathed gently in his ear—a voice he had heard *once* before, “*Thou fool, why so impatient? Thou art the last!*” He was silent.

“It would ill beseem me,” continued Fitz-Maurice, addressing them collectively, “for any cause, less than the one that sways me singly, and binds me to you all, to breathe the thoughts that now agitate my mind. But we tread close upon the unveiling of these mysteries; and, one faltering step, one timid spirit, in the final act, would not alone frustrate all—not alone render valueless, as the dust beneath your feet, all that has been done—but would leave me, and all of you, to a fate, from the bare contemplation of which my soul recoils with horror. Therefore it is, that in this place, and at this hour, I would renew that chivalrous oath of fealty which, three nights since, you took, to watch and fear not, for twice the period you had already done so. By this holy emblem, I swear,” he continued (taking up the Jerusalem cross that still lay upon the table before him,) “it is not that I

doubt your manly spirits to confront whate'er shall show itself—neither your fidelity in what you stand engaged to do: but *I* have conditions to fulfil—conditions which must not, in their smallest obligation, be infringed. Now, it is known to ye all, that, in the self-imposed oath you took—the voluntary league you framed—one among you denied your power, laughed at your compact, and refused to plight his troth. You were not of one voice, therefore, in your pre-determined will, howe'er it might fall, that you were of one purpose, in the execution of it. But, more than all, it was *from* yourselves, and *to* yourselves, the oath proceeded and applied; for *I* could not then receive, what now I can; which is, that on *my* sword you swear, for eight-and-forty hours, to hold yourselves my followers. And you must do this with absolute and entire confidence—without question; wherefore, I require it,—or reservation whereto it shall compel you?"

Fitz-Maurice ceased, and drawing forth his sword, held it out. The blade was a superb Damascus one, one half exquisitely polished, and the other, up to the hilt, black, and traced all over with strange hieroglyphic characters, wrought in gold.

There was a brief pause. At length Peverell arose, and placing his hand upon that part of the sword which bore the mystic inscription, exclaimed, "I swear!" The rest followed his example.

"And now," said Fitz-Maurice, returning his weapon to its scabbard, "there remains but this, and we separate. Heed me well. Hold no communion to-morrow with each other; but let every one so employ the time, as he would in preparation for a great emprise. We are never so well fitted to receive Heaven's best gifts, as when we are ready for its most trying dispensations. He whose sinews are strung for the camel's burden, will not faint beneath the weight of his own. Be each of you companion to his own thoughts only; and when the sun goes down, be willing, and in a condition, to exclaim,—'If thou rise no more for me, thou joyous orb, I mourn not; for I shall dwell in uncreated light, that was, ere time began, and shall be, when it is no more!' This is a Christian's daily death, who therefore never dies, but passes onward to eternity. At the eleventh hour of night assemble—not where you have been wont—but beside the hum-

ble grave of him who first wrestled with this mighty mystery. There will I be! It is meet we now depart."

Fitz-Maurice rose, and, followed by the rest, paced along the sounding aisles, which seemed to echo their footsteps in more than mortal sounds. Arrived at the door, they found Mephosto waiting with his palfrey, which he instantly mounted, and waving his hand to them, galloped off, as he exclaimed, "Remember!"

De Clare, Peverell, and the others, walked slowly along. No one spoke; and, when separating, they bade each other good night, each man proceeded homewards, with such thoughts and feelings as had never yet occupied his mind or heart.



CHAPTER XVI.

HELEN had carefully avoided any interview with her father, during the remainder of the preceding day, after Fitz-Maurice left her; and before he returned from the Abbey, she had retired to her chamber for the night. She had passed the intermediate hours in weeping and praying; in silent meditation, and in fruitless efforts to penetrate the future.

What most embarrassed and afflicted her, was the positive injunction of Fitz-Maurice, that no human being should know of her design on the following night. It was like condemning her to severe bodily pain, and forbidding her to cry out. The enterprise was big with she knew not what dangers and difficulties, and she was pitilessly enjoined to brave them all, by the unsupported energy of her own mind. This thought almost overpowered her, sometimes; and she became half resolved to renounce the performance of her promise, from an idea that if what had been exacted of her were pure and holy, it could not need such secrecy.

Then, with a trembling hand, she would turn over the leaves of those books she possessed, which disclosed all

the mysteries of the necromantic art, to see if there were any trials which others had undergone, or any situations in which others had been placed, that at all resembled her own. But she could find none; though she discovered much that taught her to dread the consequences of violating such a compact as she had made. Above all, she feared that influence of wizard wrath, which might place knives, or halters, or deadly infusion of life-destroying herbs, in her path, and so tempt her, beyond her strength, to horrible self-murder! She closed her books, strengthened rather than weakened in her resolution, to hazard whatever might happen from the third display of the signet's potency.

Often did she look upon that mysterious agent of an invisible and unknown power; and often did her tears fall upon it, as she darkly wondered what might be its remaining behest. At those moments, her thoughts reverted to her father—to all that Fitz-Maurice had said—to all that had passed at Margery Ashwell's.

It was her pride and consolation to reflect, in this crisis of her fate, that no considerations of what could happen to herself, divided for an instant, or mingled with, the singleness of her anxiety for her father's safety. What, indeed, she felt most bitterly was, that in all she had done, in all she had suffered, she was still baffled in that for which she had done all, and suffered all. She was not assured that her beloved father's life was beyond the aim of danger. She hoped it was—she believed it was—she strove to torture a meaning out of Fitz-Maurice's words, and out of Alascon's answers, which would warrant both; but still the sickening dread returned upon her, that when it was too late, perhaps, she would find how fondly she had construed every thing. Even the idle roundelay, which the blind minstrel had played, and the blue-eyed girl had sung, came in aid of her worst fears; and she repeated often, with a sorrowful and foreboding heart,

“But the pang of despair, which was keener than all,
Was the pang of her soul for a word past recall.”

At other times, she would think with dismay of the closing vision of the magic glass, and, in passionate grief, throw herself upon her knees, and pray to Heaven that her right arm might wither, and drop from her, if that hi-

deous shadow foretold a truth. In this agony, a ray of comfort would break forth, in the remembrance that she had beheld herself, confined and sepulchred, ere the other appalling phantom crossed her, and so, perchance, it might be the emblem of that death which her own would inflict upon her unhappy father: a thought infinitely more tolerable than the other.

Nor could she disguise from herself, in the stormy conflict of contending hopes, and fears, and wishes, that a prevailing desire ran through them all—to release Fitz-Maurice, (even at the price of her own life, if that alone were demanded,) from his destiny, whatever it was: to do “one deed of heavenly goodness more;” to give “one closing trial of her faith;” one “last display of dauntless courage;” to “strike off his fetters;” to “throw wide open his prison doors;” to “redeem him from his captivity.”

All the feelings with which that mysterious being had first inspired her; all the intense sympathy and ardent pity which he had first awakened in her bosom, had been a hundred fold increased by his last appeal. She imagined, she knew not why, but she was conscious of the impulse (as if it were the highly wrought sense of a great moral and religious duty) that some obligation, which had Heaven for its warrant, some obscurely sacred command, lay upon her to work out his redemption. The most subtle examination of her own heart could detect there no lurking human love—no struggling woman’s passion—but solely and entirely an absorbing, overpowering, and pleasing conviction, that she had been born, and had been permitted to live till then, only for the accomplishment of this predestined purpose. No holy virgin, kneeling at the cloistered shrine, and wrapt in devout ecstasy, as she dedicated herself, for aye, to the service of Almighty God, ever did so with a more sainted spirit, than did Helen, at some moments of her solitary meditations, consecrate herself the “bride of Christ,” when, in imagination, she was crying aloud at the Abbey door, “Husband, come! the cross is mine!”

Thus passed the hours of solitude to which she had consigned herself, alternately the sport of earthly fears and heavenly hopes; now, desert with mortal apprehensions—now, soaring, with enthusiastic spirit, into visionary worlds—at one moment, shrinking with all her sex’s fear,

fulness from danger, and at the next, glowing with all a martyr's zeal, steadfast in the truth. Filial love, pious obedience, and natural misgivings, besieged her heart in quick succession. The first and last distressed it; the second only seemed to subdue its anguish. She dwelt upon it, therefore, more frequently, and every time with increasing fervour.

As often as she regarded herself called to this sharp trial, by the darkly revealed will of God; as often as she saw, in her prescribed task, only the fulfilling of his mandate, all doubt and terror vanished. There was then no link in her thoughts which connected them with this earth. They partook of that sanctity which elevates things temporal to things spiritual, and transformed what was required of her, from a dubious duty to a sacred obligation.

It was no wonder, therefore, that, in the end, she gradually and insensibly, almost, clung to this belief; that she banished alike from her mind those hopes and fears which she could neither confirm nor remove; and that she endeavoured to repose, calmly and meekly, upon the assurance of a pre-ordained mission of holiness. It was with this strong persuasion, created in her after a long and severe self-struggle, that she retired to her pillow. But the subject of her waking meditations weaved itself into the shadowy texture of her dreams; and her slumbering fancy beguiled her with vain shows, which she recalled with a more than superstitious confidence in what they foreboded.

She dreamed she was a living witness of that great work of redemption wrought for us, by the infinite mercy and goodness of Him, who was crucified. She stood, in the valley of carcasses, at the foot of Mount Calvary, and beheld that perfect example and pattern of all meekness and sufferance, led forth to his most vile and slanderous death! She saw his blessed body hanging upon the cross, his head covered with sharp thorns, his hands and feet wounded with nails, his side pierced with a long spear, his flesh rent and torn with whips, his brows sweating water and blood; and she felt the earth quake beneath her feet, and saw the stones cleave asunder—and the graves open, and the dead bodies rise. While gazing with intolerable agony and dismay upon this awful scene,

she thought an aged man who stood beside her, wailing and lamenting in deep tribulation, exclaimed, "Daughter! take heed to thyself and to thy soul, with all carefulness, lest thou forgettest the things which thine eyes have seen." And she said, "Why, oh father! speakest thou this?" And he replied, "That thou mayest know, in the time to come, wherefore thou wert born." And she thought it *was* her father who spake to her: but at that moment, and ere she could answer again, the multitude raised a loud shout; and were violently agitated to and fro; and with the tumult and noise, she awoke.

At any other time, and with a mind less disturbed, Helen would have regarded this vision of her sleep as the natural consequence, and nothing more, of the reflections which had engrossed her thoughts during the day. But now, it was no idle dream; no airy phantasm of the brain, wildly sporting at will, while reason slumbered, and delusively clothing itself in the very shape and seeming which her own sick heart had imagined; but an actual and solemn manifestation, by divine agency, of the thing she was to do. She found, indeed, an infinite relief in the persuasion that her path was now distinctly pointed out, and that she need no longer perplex herself with vain endeavours to discover it. Clouds and shadows still rested upon it in the distance: she could not see beyond them: she knew not why she was to tempt them, but she was prepared to do so, and found herself mistress of sufficient fortitude, as she firmly believed, to abide whatever might follow.

Lacy sought an interview with Helen soon after she had risen, on the following morning, and while she was still pondering on all the circumstances connected with her enterprise, and with her dream of the preceding night. He, too, had anxiously revolved in his thoughts, the extraordinary fate of Wilfrid Overbury, and the earnest desire of Fitz-Maurice that they should renew their oath to himself; as well as the reasons he assigned for requiring that new covenant, and, above all, the emphatic language he had addressed to them, when directing that they should assemble the next night at the grave of Kit Barnes. But he possessed an elasticity of character which soon recovered itself from the pressure of events. It had been the business of his life, to act rather than to

think; to perform what was to be done, rather than to inquire too curiously the cause; and to pass, with rapidity, from one undertaking to another. He possessed, also, what is a very common consequence of such habits, a fondness for the excitement produced by a quick succession of hazardous situations; and most certainly, he looked forward to the final development of all the strange scenes in which he had been recently engaged, with more of impatient curiosity than of fear or reluctance



CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN Helen entered the room in which her father was sitting, he was struck with her altered appearance. It was not that she looked care-worn; or that her eyes were inflamed with weeping; or that her air was languid from sickness; or that the weariness of a restless night hung about her. A deep gloom overspread her pallid countenance; a determined energy was imprinted on every feature. Her eye was cold and resolute; her brow was knit, as if the mind within were ruminating upon some great design whose secret character none might penetrate; and about her slightly quivering lips played an exulting expression, partaking equally of conscious firmness and half revealed fear. Her voice, too, was mournfully tender, giving forth those calm, dejected tones, which speak the feelings of a heart that sorrows without hope; while her whole deportment denoted the hard fought victory of a gentle spirit warring with itself, and twining with its sad laurels, the sadder cypress wreath.

She read in her father's looks, all that he would have spoken. She knew, full well, they were but the reflection of her own; but she felt it was no time for soft words or bland endearments; and the effort she made to repel their approach, only imparted an increased sternness to her manner.

"I am your Helen, still," said she, (as Lacy took her hand, and gazed in her face with that silent grief which

never yet found words to tell itself—the prophetic grief of an adoring heart, that sees, or fancies it sees, death's pale summons on the cheek it loves)—“I am your Helen still, only less happy, perchance, than I have been wont. But smiles will come again, when hope, like returning spring, shall scatter her fresh flowers over my now wintry mind.”

Lacy pressed her hand, and turned aside his head, to conceal the tears which he could not command back.

“What happened last night?” continued Helen, calmly.

“In the Abbey, do you mean?” said Lacy, with a tremulous voice, seating himself in a chair, with his face still averted.

“Yes,” replied Helen, “in the Abbey. Was Fitz-Maurice there?”

“He was,” answered Lacy.

“And,” added Helen, after a pause, while seating herself by her father's side, “what said he? what did he? or rather, what was done?”

“Why should I distress you farther in this business?” said he. “Do I not perceive how fatally the knowledge of it has already worked? Do I not know, even from your own lips, that it hath engulfed you in its vortex? The unexplained mystery of your chain and cross, (which, observe, I seek not to penetrate, but wait till you see the fit time for divulging,) informs me, too certainly, that in some way or other you have, for my sake, connected yourself with these dark events. I cannot, perhaps, undo the past; but I may be able to avoid augmenting the perils of the future.”

“Why, then, I am denied,” answered Helen, “to partake with you the perils you admit. And why? Because you think I am too much woman to bear their onset. Indeed, indeed, if you knew all, if you *could* know all, I should be the chosen sharer of your secrets; and not their rejected seeker.”

“If I *could* know all!” exclaimed Lacy, “what is it you mean?”

“That you should think me, as you have ever found me,” replied Helen, “worthy of your confidence. This may seem high language from a daughter; but in sooth, it is from no bold, immodest spirit, that I speak thus. In

all, save this, I own a becoming obedience to thy will; in naught, save this, should I trust myself with nay, when thou hadst said ay."

Lacy was subdued: not more by the gentle submission of this appeal, than by the repose of Helen's manner, which breathed the serenity of a mind settled to some great purpose, from which no ordinary impediments could divert it, and which evidently sought the information it would have, not to guide or determine its course, (for that was fixed beyond changing,) but to possess a full knowledge, if possible, of all that might avail to make it efficacious. He, therefore, no longer hesitated to relate the occurrences of the preceding night, to the whole of which Helen listened with deep attention. She evinced much horror, at the recital of Overbury's crimes, and astonishment at the visible representation of them on board the Scorpion; seemed surprised at the renewal of their oaths towards Fitz-Maurice, and could hardly conceal her agitation when she heard where they were to assemble that night. She made her father repeat, more than once, the very words used by Fitz-Maurice in enjoining them to hold no communion with each other during the day, and dwelt, with apparent anxiety, upon his declaration, that they were treading close upon the unveiling of all these mysteries.

"What he meant," observed Lacy, "by saying 'it has not been always thus, and would not be so now, but for thee and thine,' when that ugly dwarf came crouching to his feet, I know not. I have no skill in riddles; and his answer to me about the dawn, and the traveller, the landscape, and sun rise, was a riddle, and nothing better, to my apprehension."

"It was his purpose," replied Helen, "so to veil his meaning, that it should not be read with too large or particular an understanding of its aim. But——"

She paused; and then suddenly changed the subject of conversation, by exclaiming, "And *you* go to the Abbey this night at *eleven* o'clock?"

"At that hour Fitz-Maurice is to be with us," replied Lacy, "but *I* do not go alone, as you seem to imagine."

"No, no," said Helen, "you will all be there—all—I know—to witness greater wonders than any you have yet beheld. I am no prophetess—no Cassandra—but I

pronounce truths that shall be: and you, my father—you, more than all, shall be moved with astonishment!"

"How know *you* this?" inquired Lacy.

"Do you remember yesterday, and ask?" replied Helen.

"I do remember yesterday, and ask," said Lacy; "for I have not, till now, seen you since your interview with Fitz-Maurice. What passed between you?"

"A wild and wondrous scene," answered Helen, "befitting the occasion; and the—man, I was about to say—but, if he be man only, all *other* men are less than what they seem."

"Is it so!" exclaimed her father, significantly.

"Fie upon that thought!" retorted Helen: "It wrongs me. Have you ever seen me so lightly enamoured, or witnessed so loose an affection in me, as to warrant the construction you have put upon my words? But this is no moment for vain discourse. In sooth, it *was* a wild and wondrous scene; for, amazement, pity, and almost madness, followed each word he spoke. I am not prone to weep; nor think there's witchcraft in a maiden's tears; but I wept to hear a tale so sad as his; and still the more I wept, as I learned how only the griefs that thronged upon him could be shaken off!"

"And how, my child," said Lacy, "can they be shaken off? If, by any honourable means, that lie not beyond me, I swear, were it only that in thy gentle heart they have awakened compassion, he might freely command my utmost."

"I know not," replied Helen, "what giant's strength it may have required to forge and rivet the fetters that gall him; but a very pigmy's will suffice to strike them loose. There needs no martial hand like thine."

"Whose then?" inquired her father.

"Mine!" responded Helen.

"Yours!" exclaimed Lacy, "I cannot comprehend you—I could almost add, I fear to do so. To what hath he obtained your consent?"

"To two things," said Helen.

"Name them," replied her father.

"The first, a solemn vow of SILENCE," answered Helen, emphatically.

"The second——" continued Lacy.

"Is in the holy keeping of that solemn vow," added Helen.

"Nay, now methinks, you do but trifle with my anxious cares for thee," said her father, in a tone that was half reproachful. "I do not lay my injunctions upon you, because it is only with rugged and ungentle natures that such rough authority is needful; but if you are, indeed, as you have said, my Helen, still, you will be like yourself, and lay your heart before me as you have ever done. Reflect a moment, my dear child, and you will acknowledge your present situation to be one which stands in need of riper counsel than your green years can offer. If you have too unwisely bound yourself to the performance of an act, or difficult, or dangerous to perform, reveal its quality, and my matured experience may find such honourable releases from it, as might never suggest themselves to your unpractised mind. Even were it otherwise, and that whate'er you intend must perforce be executed, still let not me be a stranger to it. For too well, I note, in thy much altered appearance, in thy sadness of speech, and in that breaking face, which fortells a breaking heart, that some heavy mischance, some grievous trouble afflicts you. Helen! you have no mother! If you had,—if that pattern of all gentleness and love were now upon earth, and could take you to her arms; if she could hang over you, and with her tears, her prayers, win you to confession—if you had her kind, maternal bosom to receive you, her endearing accents to comfort you, her watchful care to guard you from all danger—I should not, as now I do, vex you with my importunities. But fancy it is your mother speaks in me, for sure I am, that could her voice pierce the tomb, it would not entreat you with a holier or a warmer love than mine!"

The tremulous tone with which Lacy uttered these last words, and the tender earnestness of his manner before, quite overpowered Helen. The mention of her mother, thrilled to her heart, and awakened bitter anguish at the thought, that in this arduous crisis of her fate, she was, indeed, without the consolation which her presence would have imparted. But she roused herself from the enervating reflection—repelled the emotions which were kindling in her bosom, drove back the gathering tears that would soon have fallen else, from her eyes, and with a determined effort to maintain the unbending firmness

which she well knew could, alone, carry her through the terrible trial that awaited her, she addressed her father:

"I am too strongly grafted in your opinion," said she, "to require that I should affirm, it is no proud temper nor moody humour, which makes me withhold instant obedience to your will. I cannot, I must not, speak; yet, judge by what I am about to declare, that a powerful necessity constrains me to conceal a part. You have no faith in that, which I most devoutly believe,—that, for purposes inscrutable to us, the Almighty hath ever permitted, and doth still permit, wizards and magicians, and charmers, and necromancers, to exercise strange powers over the operations of nature; to know the future; and by subtle enchantments, to influence the events of this world. Why, else, are we admonished of such things, in the sacred homilies delivered in our churches, and taught to pray for deliverance from the evils which they can inflict upon us? But is it not in daily proof that what I say is true? All men do not believe so, you will reply; and my answer is, that all men do not believe in Christ crucified. But shall they, whose faith is lively in the cross, renounce it, because paynims and Jews deny our blessed Redeemer? You will not wonder then, my dear father, having told you I devoutly believe in the intermediate agency of these mysterious beings, that, seeing what hath taken place in our venerable Abbey, and filled with insupportable fears for thy safety, I have sought to obtain, by means like those which I deemed had encompassed you with danger, a power to save you."

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed Lacy, "you have not, surely invoked the dark spirits of the abyss, or subdued them to your will, by any of those damning spells and sorceries which I have heard of?"

"How could I do so," replied Helen, with a smile, "if, as your creed is, there are no such dark spirits, no such spells, no such sorceries?"

"True," said her father, "but I may be wrong; and in the bare possibility that I am, lies a tremendous consequence, if, in your knowledge of the truth, you have employed them to your soul's perdition."

"Heaven forefend," exclaimed Helen, "that, for any earthly good, I should barter away eternal felicity! No! I love you with a sufficient devotion, and prize your life

and happiness enough to offer my own for them; to exchange for them all of my wordly hope: but I love my God more, and prize his approving smile beyond all the temptations that could make me forfeit it!"

"There spoke my own Helen!" said Lacy, pressing her hand affectionately—"there the sainted nature of thy mother shone brightly forth! Well, my child: thus relieved, I think I can calmly hear all that thou hast to say more."

"It is but little," rejoined Helen. "*I have employed, and holily employed, in all that concerns myself, for I sought my object through the cunning skill of others, those necromantic arts by which the future is unveiled to mortal eyes. Nor have I employed them vainly. I am amazed there should dwell that look of doubt upon your face. Can you remember what you have yourself seen,—can you remember the finding of my cross and chain, with the mystic scroll floating in the former—and still refuse to believe that they are not all natural? Methinks, if I could tell you yet a little more than what thou hast already seen, these doubts would for ever vanish. But this I may not. What I have learned, is for mine own heart to know, not for my tongue to utter. And my hopes are fervent, that at the appointed time, all the sufferings I have endured, all the trials I have sustained, will yield a rich harvest in the power I shall have to protect you, should perils circumvent you. Fitz-Maurice is now your avowed leader in this great business: for great it is, and holy too, I do believe! Heed him well; I speak it not lightly or fantastically, when I say he is the champion of a sacred cause, however it may also appear that he hath been captive to a sinful and impure spirit. Oh, my father! ere yon sun shall shine again where now it does, my lips will be unsealed, all mystery will depart from me, and thou, like a good and faithful soldier to the last, shall return, with honour, to thy once more peaceful home!"*

"That I shall be the last, or among the last, to quit this enterprise," said Lacy, "is most true. For though I began it with a fickle purpose, scarcely resolved, from hour to hour, whether to stop, or go on, I am now too deeply engaged, both by my plighted honour to others, and my cares for thee, to renounce it. But I shall wear a heavy heart to-night! I know not why it should be so,

more than last night, for then my thoughts were full of you, and gloomier withal, in that I was less acquainted with the nature of the thing I feared. It might serve to enforce a preacher's text upon the uncertainty of life, if I, who have sought death in every dangerous path, in the listed field, in foreign climes, mid shouting squadrons, and on the midnight watch, should find him at last, like a lazy citizen at home, who is knocked on the head in some street brawl!"

"I pray you, talk not thus," said Helen, "or I shall lose confidence in myself, and mar I know not what, by forsaking my intentions. But why do you fear the issue of this night's business?"

"I will not call it fear," replied Lacy, "but a foreboding sadness, which I can well believe, I should not have, wert thou clear of all participation in our proceedings."

"Oh! banish that augury," answered Helen, "if there be nothing more to warrant your sadness. Did Fitz-Maurice, when he appointed the hour of eleven to meet him, speak of twelve?"

"Of twelve!" responded Lacy.

"Ay," continued Helen, "of the hour of twelve?"

"No," replied her father. "I have told you, with what exactness my memory would let me, the whole that passed."

"Then," said Helen, "I bid you be prepared for that hour."

"Why?"

"That," said she, "the hour itself must tell: but watch! And now," she continued, rising from her seat, "it would refresh my wearied spirit to walk awhile—the air is cool, and the sun bright. His cheerful beams will dispel the clouds that have gathered over us."

CHAPTER XVIII.

HELEN was desirous of terminating a conversation which she felt could continue no longer, without becoming every moment more and more embarrassing. She had disclosed all she could: all, indeed, she wished at that time; and she knew she had touched the verge, the brink of all she dare, in directing her father's attention to the hour when she herself should appear in the Abbey; while the having done so would inevitably have led to farther questions on his part. Therefore it was that she proposed to go forth upon the terrace; a proposition to which Lacy readily assented; and during their walk she studiously contrived to keep him in conversation upon every subject but the one which had hitherto been the theme of their discourse. On their return to the house, Helen retired immediately to her own chamber; where she continued for several hours alone, still absorbed in meditation upon the task she had to perform, and which as the time drew near, presented itself to her imagination under a thousand different aspects.

She was sitting at her window, pensively watching the declining sun, and thinking whether she should ever again look upon its departing glories, when little Bridget entered her room, with a visible expression of alarm upon her countenance. She pointed to the door, and exclaimed, "Don't be frightened—she's coming:" and before Helen could inquire who was coming, she saw the decrepit form of Margery Ashwell limping towards her, leaning on the black twisted crutch, whose transformation to a living reptile had so terrified her, on the night of the incantation.

Helen could not repress a slight tremor, which ran through her shivering frame, as she looked at the beldam, and remembered with what malignant fury she had threatened her, when the agony of her feelings prevented her from speaking to the spirit, which, with such powerful charms, she had evoked. As to poor little Bridget, the

drifted snow is not more colourless than were her cheeks and lips; and, when a look from Helen told her she was to leave the chamber, she did so without the use of her eyes; for not once did she take them off Margery, till she had the door in her hand, and then she directed one beseeching and pitying glance towards her mistress, as if she would have said, in her own emphatic brevity of speech, "don't trust her! God help you!"

Helen, however, had recovered from the first feeling of trepidation excited by this unexpected visit, and kindly placed a chair for the withered crone, who seated herself in it with a "Heigho!" as if she were sorely fatigued by her walk,

"It is a weary distance," said she, "for my old limbs! And I made the distance greater, by coming through the church-yard, and down the green lane, at the back of the Abbey, to avoid the rabblement; for when they see me in the town, they call me witch, and set young urchins to pinch me; and the wenches will leave their spinning, to come and tear my flesh, till they see blood. Hang them! I harm them not, though not a mischief happens, to child or mother, cattle or house, but it is of my doing! So I keep the field, and the heath, and the lone path, and steal abroad at this still hour of evening, when the owl wakes for the night, and the glow-worm trims his lamp by the last beam of the setting sun."

Helen did not venture to interrupt her during this soliloquy, but waited till she should, herself, and after her own manner, declare the object of her visit. The beldam, however, seemed in no hurry to do so; for she now sat, muttering to herself in half words and sentences, while her sharp gray eyes wandered wildly round the apartment, noting all that it contained; and sometimes their penetrating look was fixed upon Helen. In one corner hung a virginal, which seemed particularly to attract her attention; whether it was that she knew not its use, or that it attracted her more frequent notice, because immediately above it was suspended a finely executed portrait of Helen's mother, painted shortly after her marriage; and round her neck she wore the very chain and cross, which Helen had intrusted to her keeping the morning she first sought her cottage. There was, too, so striking a resemblance between Helen and her mother,

as the latter appeared when this likeness was taken, except in the colour of the hair, that the picture might almost have passed for a portrait of herself. After some time, she again addressed Helen:

"You came to me," said she, "in doubt and trouble, and I did my best to relieve both; but, had I known the potent spell you bore about you, I could have done much more. You should have had Hecate herself to answer you, though you had demanded to know the charm by which she puts the darkened moon into an eclipse."

"I heard and saw enough," said Helen, shuddering at the recollection of the scene.

"I was never so bestraught," continued the hag, "as when I saw your fair hand stretched forth, and heard you pronounce those compelling words. But that is past. You swooned, or——"

"Or what!" exclaimed Helen, eagerly, perceiving that Margery hesitated.

"Alascon had shown you ANOTHER vision, worth all the rest!"

"What was it?" said Helen. Did you see it?"

"Ay," replied Margery, with a sigh.

"What was it?" repeated Helen: tell me!"

"By the pit of Acheron, I dare not," she replied.

"My tongue would wither, and become like the blasted bough of a thunder-stricken tree, if it spoke of what the eye alone should see."

A pause ensued. The hag sat rocking to and fro, her two hands leaning upon her crutch, and guttural sounds, that scarcely took the shape of words, issuing from her lips. Helen, opposite to her, her pale face lighted up with the flush cast upon it by the crimson effulgence of the westering sun, her cheek supported by her delicately formed hand, and her full dark eyes bent upon the ground; while busy thought was calling forth image after image, as her fancy strove to picture what might have been the unseen vision of Alascon's mirror, that was worth all the rest. How beautifully were contrasted, at that moment, her youthful figure, her pensive features, and her sun-illuminated brow of alabaster, with the aged form, palsied limbs, and wrinkled face of Margery Ashwell, dimly visible in the thickening gloom of the shadows of evening?

Helen now slowly raised her head, and looking at Margery, "Though," said she, "you dare not tell me what my heart yearns to know, you can disclose, perhaps, that which took place after I became insensible."

"That can I, and that may I," exclaimed Margery, starting up, as if from a profound reverie; "and that will I, too! There shall be many a gentle maiden perplexed as thou art, ere there shall be another favoured as thou art. Thou cam'st, in the dark hour of midnight, to my cottage; and yet, I trow, thy shoon were not wet with the dank grass, nor thy dainty feet weary with the many steps I have trod to come hither. Ah, well-a-day—it was a sight, I ween, to make an old heart leap for joy, to see how thou wast no sooner down in sorrow than raised in comfort, and, like a nursling in its mother's arms, borne away, tramp! tramp! on the swift steed of the **BLACK HORSEMAN**."

"The Black Horseman!" exclaimed Helen.

"Ay," said Margery. "The flesh lights were yet burning as he entered, and e'en as I would pick up a feather, he lifted you from the earth, and sprung with you into his saddle."

"You mean,"—replied Helen, with a faltering voice; "you mean Fitz-Maurice."

"I mean the **BLACK HORSEMAN**," said Margery; "call you him Fitz-Maurice, or any name you list—He, who rides the world by day, and by night, and will to the Holy Land and back again, while a cloud, no bigger than my hand, sails across the moon—he, who gallops over steeples, if a church-yard lie in his way, because a mightier one than himself hath put him under the ban of never finding a grave! It is upon his errand I am here; and, beshrew me, I have prated so long, that the twilight will be gone, ere I perform it."

Helen was unable to speak; the designation which Margery had given to Fitz-Maurice astonished her; and her blood ran chill as she thought of it.

"Here," continued Margery Ashwell, as she drew from beneath her cloak, an oblong ebony box, which had been fastened to her side by a leathern strap, "here is what you will need to-night."

She laid the box upon the ground, opened it, and took out a long white veil and a bridal garment.

"How is this?" exclaimed Helen, with increasing agitation and surprise.

"It is for you," said Margery.

"For me! And from whom?" replied Helen.

"You need not ask from whom, or for what," muttered the beldam. "Whither thou goest to-night, thou canst not go except it be with this gear on thee. Why, what a coil is here, forsooth!—I tell thee again, there shall be many a gentle maiden perplexed as thou art, ere there shall be another favoured as thou art. I would be thy tire-woman, and array thee in this robe of gladness, but that my son, my delicate Hopdance, hath the knotted cramp, and moans for my return. And here," continued Margery, holding up a small silken bag, "here is that, which, hung round thy ivory neck, shall make thee walk unseen amid the gaze of a thousand eyes; as every shame-faced virgin would fain do at her espousal. This is the wondrous herb that bears no flower; whose quick conceiving seed engendereth in a single night; 'twas gathered by myself, after many a weary watching. Rustic maidens call it fern seed; and whoso carries it near her heart, and wills that it should work, is straight invisible to mortal sight. Helen surveyed, with an aching heart, the things that were spread before her; but ere she could again address herself to Margery, the ancient dame had hobbled to the door, and holding up her crutch, exclaimed, as she quitted the room, "Rejoice, that thine hour of deliverance is nigh."

"Rejoice!" she repeated to herself, and sunk into silent meditation. Her mind, which had assumed something like composure, was now again unbalanced. She could not dismiss from it the thought of the *Black Horseman*, which seemed to convey a notion of Fitz-Maurice, far different from any she had entertained respecting him. It was doubtless he, and no one else, who had conveyed her out of the cottage. Yet it might have been some spirit of darkness! But that was impossible, for the bridal garments that lay at her feet, could have come only from Fitz-Maurice, for only he knew the use that was to be made of them. She was thus wandering from conjecture to conjecture, when she heard the steps of Bridget approaching; and she hastily concealed the ebony box, with its contents, as her faithful domestic entered with lights.

Helen found a relief in her unobtrusive conversation, and permitted her to remain; but she carefully evaded every allusion to the object of Margery Ashwell's visit.



CHAPTER XIX.

LACY and his daughter were not the only two who looked forward, with an anxious mind, to the coming night. The address of Fitz-Maurice had left a vivid impression upon all; and, though they strictly observed his injunction to have no communion with each other during the day, the grounds of that injunction, added to the extraordinary circumstances of Overbury's fate, and the solemn place appointed for their next meeting, incessantly occupied their thoughts.

Peverell grasped the subject with that singleness of resolution which had marked his conduct throughout. The same determined feeling which made him ride up to the Abbey walls, on the night when he and Clayton were returning from Dunstable, to know *what* it was they had seen, now animated him, to know what was to be the end of all they had seen. There was neither ostentation nor frivolity in his motives. Chance had thrown a difficulty in his way; and a naturally cool and persevering character impelled him to surmount it. Having fully satisfied himself upon one point, that there was something to find out, he was content steadily to follow the path which promised to conduct him to the object of his search. It was true, there had been some circumstances, in the progress of the business, which identified him with it, more than any of the rest; but it was not, therefore, that his purpose had been so uniform. He was like a man who had begun to ascend a lofty hill; every step he took, while it brought him nearer to its summit, made him less and less inclined to retrace his ground.

De Clare, on the contrary, who had commenced the inquiry in scorn, almost, and had struggled, more than once, with the proud impatience of his nature, which could

not brook to be baffled in its aim, now pursued it with a sort of angry humour, as if he sought to propitiate himself, by finding, at the end, something which should vindicate the beginning. It is doubtful, however, whether any thing short of that pact of honour, which had united him first with his associates, and bound him afterwards to Fitz-Maurice, would have held him to the last: for he delighted to walk alone—to be followed rather than to follow—and to survey, with a scoffing spirit, the busy turmoil of that world from which he disdainfully kept aloof. Something, indeed, was to be ascribed to the influence of Fitz-Maurice, whose absolute and mysterious manner swayed De Clare in spite of himself. He could not sound the depth of his character as he could that of other men; and, although there was a lurking proneness in his bosom, sometimes, to dethrone him from his supremacy, he always found it impossible to do so. Still less possible was it after the events of the preceding night; and it was even with an unrepining acquiescence, that he submitted to the mandate of abstaining from all intercourse with the rest during that day. “This man hath something in him!” he would exclaim. “He is marked out from the common herd; and it is not altogether an inglorious bondage to be fettered by his authority. By heavens! I hardly think I could carry it myself with a more brave and noble front, against such a heady current of difficulties!” This last consideration mainly contributed to reconcile him with himself.

The choleric Welchman, who would have fought his way out of peril like a lion, but who would seek peril only as an alternative, where the choice lay between bad and worse, breathed more than one wish, after quitting the Abbey the preceding night, that he had never entered it. He was one of those who thought, with the adage, that it is best to have a long spoon when you eat with the devil. Hitherto he had been a watcher, with no other fear than what might be produced by the events of each night; and he had courage enough to draw his chance in the lottery of danger. But he now began to feel that it was quite another thing to go and receive his warrant, as it were, for his individual and allotted portion of the general hazard. It was the difference, in his estimation, between being one of many in a fray, where accidents

might happen, and thrusting his head into a furnace, where a miracle *must* happen, if he got it out again. So, at least, he interpreted the language of Fitz-Maurice: and with such misgiving did he look forward to the night that was approaching. Yet, though he would have given, at that moment, half his remaining time to live, had he never seen the Abbey at all, he would not have accepted a release from whatever was to come, at the price of a single hair plucked from his beard. He was no coward: he was a stranger to that pale passion: but he lacked the energy of mind which enables a man to confront calmly the peril he can dare intrepidly.

As to Hungerford Hoskyns, he troubled himself no farther with the business, than just to remember that he was to find his way, by eleven o'clock, to the grave of Kit Barnes. Come what might, it would come unheeded. His mind was like the waves of the sea, which divide themselves beneath the passing keel, and close again in the same instant. It received every impression, but retained none. To his thoughts it could scarcely be said there belonged either a past or a future: for the former was obliterated every moment, and the latter was incessantly absorbed in the present. If any one had asked him what *had* taken place in the Abbey, it would have confounded him as much as if he had been required to tell what he dreamed of that day three years; and if he had asked himself what *was* to take place, he would have looked at the sky, and, with a laugh, exclaimed, "Can I tell whether the sun will shine at twelve o'clock next Christmas day! No, verily. But when Christmas comes, we shall all know if it does."

Walwyn had no leisure, from his grief for the death of Vehan, to perplex himself much with the approaching issue of the enterprise. Nor would he have considered it too nicely, had it been otherwise, after having deliberately consented to follow it so far. He was one of those men, in whose nature reason is so predominant, that he would hardly change the colour of his cloak, or walk to the right, instead of the left, without having first satisfied his mind as to his own motives. He never shot his arrow to fall where it might, but always had an aim, near or distant, great or little. In this business, he considered it incumbent upon him, when it was first bruited about,

to lend the authority of his countenance, (as one whose station and wealth gave him influence,) to whatever measures should be deemed necessary for subjecting it to a satisfactory investigation. Hence it was, that he sent in his name to the mayor: hence, too, he had continued his attendance: and hence he was resolved to co-operate in bringing it to a conclusion, though the disaster of his kinsman's death had blunted the keenness of the interest he had hitherto felt.

The perfumed gallant, Nicholas Mortimer, had bestowed five minutes of very serious consideration upon the affair, while offering up his morning prayers to his glass, and devoutly imploring that he might be spared the fate of Narcissus. "I protest by my manhood!" he exclaimed, "I will go to this ugly rendezvous in the churchyard; but I protest, no less, by this glossy curl that so becomes my lip, it were a shame to cry out upon, if that Monsieur Fitz-Maurice, with his invisible rapier, should serve me as he did our late friend, the sea-Monster; for

"Tell me, thou earthen vessel, made of clay,
What beauty's worth, if thou must die to-day?"

But Nicholas Mortimer talked of death, as lusty youth moralizes upon gray hairs, with an exulting consciousness of the years that lie between the discourse and its subject. With all his outside foppery, he had manliness within; and, upon any trial to which he might be put, he would have proved, that, when he swore by his manhood, he swore by that he had. He was like a good book, with a soiled title-page—his first leaf was his worst. Turn that over, and the inside hath wherewithal to recommend itself.

Thus did each, in his own retirement, meditate upon the singular prohibition which lay upon all, not to have mutual communication. Mean while, the hours glided on, and Peverell was sitting, musing in his chamber, as the afternoon wore away, when his man, Francis, entered, and announced a stranger, who would not communicate his name. Peverell had scarcely heard the tidings, when a person appeared before him, habited in a foreign garb. His stature was of the middle height; his air, courteous and unembarrassed; his countenance very pale, and his

look, altogether, wan and haggard. He stood, for a moment, and eyed Peverell with a calm, steady gaze, as if he were debating with himself, whether he was the individual he sought. Peverell at length addressed him:

"I crave your name," said he, pointing to a chair, which the stranger immediately occupied.

"I crave yours," replied the stranger, in a gentle tone of voice.

"Marmaduke Peverell," was the answer.

"And mine, Conrad Geister," said the stranger.

"May I crave your business, too?" added Peverell.

"It is with you, Marmaduke Peverell," answered Conrad.

"Impart it," said Peverell; "I am ready to hear."

"So shalt thou be to thank me, when thou dost hear. I come to save thee."

"To save me!" repeated Peverell, "from what, or from whom?"

"From him who *calls* himself Fitz-Maurice," replied Geister; "who is—but no matter for that. Enough for what I seek, that we both mean the same."

"I know Fitz-Maurice," said Peverell.

"And I know him," interrupted Geister, "when in the frozen regions of the north, in the mountains and valleys of Scandinavia, he prowled for blood. I will be frank with you, Marmaduke Peverell, and so merit your confidence. It is for no love I bear you, that I am here. Why should it? I know you not; but it is for the hate I bear Fitz-Maurice."

"He has wronged you, then?" said Peverell.

"Such deadly wrong," continued Geister, "as he should have answered with a hundred lives, if he had had them; or with the one he has, were he vulnerable to mortal weapon; but he is armed in devilish sorcery."

"It may be so," replied Peverell; "but it hath been by other means he hath prevailed with me."

"Doubtless," retorted Geister, with a sarcastic smile.

"He hath a glozing tongue, a pregnant wit, and an admirable carriage. He can talk smoothly, cozen men with ambiguous phrases; play the Delphic god, with oracular responses; and prate like a cardinal about things holy. It is thus he makes the fools of the world his prey. But are you so dull or so credulous, that you will let this de-

mi-devil lead you hood-winked to the edge of the precipice, and mock at you as you topple over?"

"Your pardon," said Peverell; "but when I know better who you are, why you have sought me out, and what you can urge, in honesty and fairness, against Fitz-Maurice, I may listen to you. At present you but waste your breath, I will be as frank with you as you have been with me. You tell me it is hatred of Fitz-Maurice that prompts you in what you do. I will take no man's character from the lips of his avowed enemy."

"Will you take it from your own?" asked Geister.

"What do you mean?" replied Peverell.

"Has he not," continued Geister, with an impassioned energy of manner, "led you on, step by step, till you find yourself enthralled, almost beyond the hope of release? Came he not to you, while yet your resolution was young, and supplied you with seeming reasons why it should wax in strength and form? Sat he not with you the first night in yonder Abbey? Did he not appear again among you, when your spirits drooped, and your purpose languished? Hath he not stirred you to bind yourselves to each other by an oath? And are you not now sworn to him by a second oath? And for what have ye done all this?—To feed your church-yards! Now, Marmaduke Peverell, answer me these questions, as ye must, and then, I say, from your own lips you may take the character of this Fitz-Maurice. Judge, too, from the knowledge they betray of what hath taken place, whether it concern you much to know who I am, farther than that I am the enemy of your enemy?"

"I might answer all your questions," said Peverell, in the affirmative, and yet be ignorant how they prove Fitz-Maurice mine enemy. If you come but to tell me what I know, how shall your errand prosper? If you have that to tell me which I do not know, the success of your errand must still lie in the quality of your information. I am not so fantastical, to demolish my opinion with the self-same reasons that I built it up. But will you answer me a plain question?"

"Ask it," said Geister.

"How have you become possessed of the knowledge you have, respecting Fitz-Maurice and myself?"

"I will *not* answer you," replied Geister.

"Then," added Peverell, "have you aught else with me? If not, I have other and better use for my time, than to waste it in idle conference like this."

"You say right," rejoined Geister, unmoved by the peremptory tone of Peverell. "You *should* have *much* to do, before you repair to the grave of that rash fool whom you buried. You see, my knowledge is not confined to what has been. I am not ignorant of what is to be."

"I grant it," replied Peverell; "but were you as well able to tell my thoughts, as you are my movements, you could not shake my resolution to go on with this business."

"It was not for that I came," said Geister, "I would have you see the end; and that you may see it, I have presented myself before you."

"You tell me," retorted Peverell, "that you come to save me. I ask you, from what or from whom, and your answer is, from Fitz-Maurice; but, in the same breath, you add, you are Fitz-Maurice's deadly enemy, and that it is your hatred of him, not your love for me, which instigates you. It follows, therefore that your first and great object is, to injure him in some way or other; while, whatever of benefit may result to me, can only be the contingent result of that mischief you meditate towards him. Again, I say, I put back the boon, proffered upon those conditions."

"I make no conditions," replied Geister, coolly. "I am here to offer you a service, in a plain, direct way. It is yourself that extracts conditions out of the intended service, by a subtle logic, which, I confess, goes quite beyond my simple apprehension."

"Well, then," said Peverell, "if that be the case, show me at once the service you aim at, and I at once will tell you whether it pleases me to accept it?"

"Why, that's honestly said!" exclaimed Geister. "Now we come to it, without more tedious parley, like men who mean the thing they say; and not as your wily statists do, whose nimble tongues, ever divorced from their hearts, outrun their own thoughts to catch the thoughts of others. Well, then, to the matter: Go not to the Abbey to-night—no, nor to the church-yard."

"Why?" inquired Peverell.

"Look you, now, how unreasonable you are!" rejoined

Geister. "You would exact full confidence; and yet, will render none. Tell me you will be at home, when the clock strikes eleven; and I promise to be with you at that same hour, to tell you why I bid you keep the house."

"How does this agree with your assurance, not five minutes since, that you came not to shake my resolution, but would have me see the end of this business?" replied Peverell.

"There are enow for to-night," said Geister, "without you; and the *end* is *not* to-night."

"This cannot be!" answered Peverell, after a moment's pause. "I must have other and stronger grounds, to abjure my oath of honour, and deny my own eager spirit the satisfaction it hungers for, than a vague premonition; with a loose promise from one whom I know not, that, at the very hour when the course I am advised to will be irrevocable, if I adopt it, I shall be instructed why it is prudent in me to do so. Either disclose all now, and let me freely judge before-hand; or leave me in the undisturbed possession of the motives I already have, for what I mean to perform."

"I should have thought," replied Geister, in a taunting tone, "that you had been sufficiently disciplined in obedience to mysterious mandates, and had long enough surrendered that free judgment you now stand for, to make the trial I would put you to no very severe exercise of your faith. I warn you of danger, and ask only some three or four hours to possess you of reasons which would justify my warning. Fitz-Maurice hath *given* you danger—bath put you all in jeopardy, and exacts unsatisfied obedience to the last. You, Marmaduke Peverell, who must have good and prevailing reasons, forsooth, to heed *me*, can shut your eyes, and, with no reason at all, cry, 'be it as thou sayest,' when he commands!"

"But——" said Peverell.

"But——" interrupted Geister, reddening with anger, "but it jumps with your humour—it flatters your vanity—it cajoles your pride—to be the seeming instrument of discovering wonders—to walk the street, and be pointed at by the finger of the multitude as the fearless he who nightly plays with horrors—to be the silly moth, which flutters round the gaudy flame that first sings, and at last consumes it! I am a stranger! You know me not! and,

therefore, it would derogate from your new-born independence of mind, to execute my unexplained injunctions. Did you know this Fitz-Maurice, better than you know me, when first he came, and worked upon your then easy nature? Do you know him now? Can you tell me whence he came?—whither he goes?—or why he hath stirred you and others to abide the issue of this damned enterprise? No? The innocent lamb that is led to slaughter, could as easily bleat out a reason why it submits its throat to the butcher's knife, as you assign a valid cause for what you do."

"Why this sudden wrath—this bitter railing?" said Peverell.

"Because it makes me mad," replied Geister, with increased warmth, "to see an honest nature like yours, betrayed to its inevitable undoing, by the treachery of those noble qualities which should be its bulwark and salvation."

"You armed me against yourself," answered Peverell, "when you told me you were the enemy of Fitz-Maurice, and came to me to make me a weapon in your hands for his destruction."

"I *am* his enemy!" exclaimed Geister, furiously—"but I would be your friend."

"Prove it," said Peverell, "by less suspicious evidence, and I will own myself your debtor."

"No!" answered Geister; "fail my vengeance, rather, and perish you!"

"Amen! with all my heart!" added Peverell. "I know not the mischance which could spring from this business, and find me unprepared."

"You are immovable, then?" said Geister.

"Ay, as the rock," answered Peverell.

"You will not be forewarned," continued Geister.

"I will not be the idle straw, that is lifted from the earth, and driven to and fro by every gust that blows from heaven," replied Peverell.

"We shall meet again," said Geister, rising; "and when we do, I prophesy you will ask, with tears, what now you spurn with scorn."

"And then," answered Peverell, proudly, "you may refuse, with scorn, whate'er it is I shall implore with tears."

"No! thou stubborn fool! ASK EVEN AT THE TWELFTH HOUR, and Conrad Geister will not deny thee!"

With these words he quitted the room; and before Peverell had well recovered from the amazement and irritation which his visit had excited, he was called upon to give audience to the mayor, who had come in a great flurry to confer with him.

"Who was that travelled gallant I met at the door?" said his worship, as soon as he was seated. "But, never mind—I have much weightier matters to talk about. Master Peverell," he continued, leaning on his elbow, and supporting his head with the fore finger of his right hand, while his countenance assumed an expression of infinite gravity; "Master Peverell, there must be no more of these devilries—there must be an end put to these vagaries of Beelzebub—I must interpose my authority to stop these sacrilegious junketings—or I shall not be able to answer for myself, as becomes myself, before the council."

"What does your worship mean?" said Peverell.

"I mean," answered the mayor, "that I have done wrong—very wrong; I see it—I am sensible of it—and I sorely condemn myself. I have aided and abetted in the carrying on of this ugly business, when I ought to have forbidden it by virtue of my authority. The people begin to cry out upon me—and not upon me only, but upon the state itself, one of whose humblest, though most loyal officers, I profess myself to be. I am in danger of a *premunire*, Master Peverell."

"I hope not," replied Peverell, with becoming solemnity.

"I hope not, too," added his worship, "but my fears are stronger than my hopes, I can tell you. For how can I purge myself of all wilful connivance, when it shall be thrown into my teeth that I have provided you with meat and drink, with wine and food—good wine, and delicate viands, as you must allow—the very ammunition, as it were, with which to carry on this unholy work!"

"But why unholy, your worship—why unholy?" interrupted Peverell.

"Tut! tut!" interrupted the mayor; "question me no reasons, when you have facts as plenty as midges after rain on a summer's evening. Where is Wilfrid Overbury? Tell me that, an' you can; and, if you cannot, give

me no quips and quirks about mere words. I say, the matter must be differently inquired into. The archbishops and the bishops must be made acquainted with it—it must become an affair of the ecclesiastical court, that men's minds may be quieted. You know not, perchance, but it is time you did, that I cannot answer for the public peace, if peace be not speedily restored within the Abbey—but of this anon. What mainly concerns my present visit to you, is touching this said Wilfrid Overbury. Strange rumours are abroad, and men's tongues begin to wag saucily upon the subject. Can you inform me where he is, or what has become of him?"

"In truth I cannot," replied Peverell, "though I could certainly give a shrewd guess upon the subject. But of what kind are the rumours you speak of?"

"Marry, that he is no where to be found," answered his worship.

"Humph!" said Peverell, musing; "that is such a rumour as men might circulate, who should hint, with a grave shake of the head, that the perfumed violet grows on no sunny bank at Hallowe'en."

"Moreover," continued his worship, "it is whispered that you know something about his disappearance."

"There, again," replied Peverell, still musing, "supposition treads upon the heels of probability. No man more likely than myself to know something of the matter."

"Farther," added his worship, "they talk of a fray that fell out between you and Overbury yesterday morning, wherein he wounded you."

"Even so," rejoined Peverell; "you see I still carry my arm in a sling."

"And lastly," said his worship, "which brings me to the point at once, some adder-tongued Jacks there be, who do not scruple to shrug their shoulders, and with a mysterious knitting of their brows, drop slanderous phrases about *secret revenge*, *dark doings*, and *midnight opportunities*!"

"How!" exclaimed Peverell.

"It is what I have heard," replied his worship; "and in the equal exercise of official duty and private friendship, I held it meet to come and tell you."

"The scald knaves!" said Peverell. "Do they think

me a night stabber, or that I have cut his throat, upon advantage, when I might have ta'en his life in open day, as the fawful forfeit of his attempt upon my own?"

"They do not absolutely stretch their speech to such a license," replied his worship, "but they go near to do it."

"While I feel indignant," answered Peverell, "at this foul suspicion, I cannot but acknowledge there is cause for the busy voice of rumour. With regard to what hath befallen Overbury, I am as free from taint in all that concerns it, as in what hath befallen Wilkins, Vehan, or my friend—my best friend—Hugh Clayton."

Peverell then proceeded to relate all the circumstances that led to Overbury's fate, as well as the manner of its taking place. He also mentioned the intention of himself and the rest, to visit the Abbey again that night, together with the hour, the place of meeting, and the probability that, whatever the mystery might be which was involved in the events that had hitherto occurred, it was on the eve of being cleared up. His worship-listened with manifest wonder to Peverell's statement; and when he had concluded, shook his head, with the grave solicitude and self-complacency of a man, who not only had others to take care of, but who saw infinitely farther than his neighbours into a difficulty.

"It is just what I expected!" said he; "just what I expected—but I have nothing here," he continued, pointing to his forehead—"no more brains than a woodcock, if there be an end, till I have imparted certain things which I wot of, to the Council, and till the bishops take it in hand. Mark you that, Master Peverell! I expect a messenger from the court to-morrow. If he come not, so; but if he come not, *certes* I go next day to London, and then you shall see what ought to have been done from the first. It is fit, however, I should act as becomes mine office. Therefore I say, leave the matter where it is: go no more, but wait till I have seen the Council. An' you will not do so, be answerable yourselves for all that follows. And so I take my leave, washing my hands of the business altogether."

His worship departed; and Peverell had leisure to reflect a little, not only upon what he had just heard, but upon his singular interview with Conrad Geister. With

respect to the latter, his reflections ended in nothing, for he could not form even the shadow of a reasonable conjecture as to who he was, or what could have been the specific object of his visit. He determined, however, to mention it to Fitz-Maurice, should he find an opportunity. With regard to Overbury, he was only surprised it had not previously occurred to him that the removal of his body was a circumstance which must inevitably give rise to various suppositions. He wondered, indeed, that neither he nor any of the others had questioned Fitz-Maurice upon the subject, if it were only that they might have a plausible explanation to give; for though Overbury had no family, he kept two domestics in his house, who would naturally raise an inquiry, when they found their master did not return home. This they had done; and hence, as the day advanced, the growing rumours which had diffused themselves from mouth to mouth, some of them, as it seemed, involving himself.



CHAPTER XX.

THE night came! The eleventh hour approached, and consternation filled every mind! The people ran to and fro, or collected in terrified groups, to gaze upon the appalling scene that presented itself! The Abbey again appeared like one huge mass of glowing fire; again were beheld careering flames, which sometimes shot along the walls, as if they were burning spears and arrows; at others, slowly unfolded themselves into unknown shapes; and then, curled up the gray towers, which seemed to melt in their fierce embrace. The earth shook beneath: the roof heaved and rolled above; the walls reeled! In the lurid air were seen grisly forms and dusky shadows flitting about, or slowly sailing round and round with enormous wings, which made a momentary darkness as they passed along. The wind roared, and, ever and anon, amid its gusty pauses, were heard screaming and howling in the sky, which mingled fearfully with the groans and cries.

of affrighted men, women, and children, who ran wildly about the streets. Every house cast forth its tenants. The sick, the lame, and the aged, rushed out to cling for protection to husbands—fathers—sons—who had joined the frantic multitude. But no one talked of comfort: no one breathed the word of consolation. The boldest, stood calmly waiting for the worst; the weakest, and the most timid, already found that worst in their fears, and wept and shrieked for aid.

One alone, in that night of horror, looked on and smiled. It was Fitz-Maurice!

As if no earthly passion found a place within his bosom—as if no human impulse throbbed within his heart—as if, with man's form only, he owned the unshrinking spirit of some god or devil, he surveyed, unmoved, the terrific scene. The bell tolled the hour of eleven, and the ground rung beneath the furious tread of his courser's feet.

De Clare, Peverell, Mortimer, Lacy, Hoskyns, Walwyn, and Owen Rees, were already assembled by the obscure grave of Kit Barnes. Fitz-Maurice came. He alighted not—he spoke not—but on his features sat an expression of serene joy. He beckoned them forth from the church-yard, and they slowly gathered round him in silence. Mephosto looked at them with malignant exultation, as he drew back his steed to make room for them near Fitz-Maurice. They were alone. None knew of their purpose to be there, and they had reached the gloomy spot unobserved. At intervals they heard, floating on the breeze, the discordant voices of the distant multitude—the sudden cry—the loud shout—the growing murmur, confusedly mingled with the howling of the wind, and with the unearthly noises, like dismal wailings, or the moanings of deep anguish, which issued from the Abbey.

“Methinks,” said De Clare, drawing his cloak round him, and folding his arms, while he addressed Fitz-Maurice, “methinks you were well advised, when you said, last night, we stood close upon the unveiling of these mysteries.”

“I was prepared for this,” replied Fitz-Maurice; “and more than this.”

“More!” exclaimed Walwyn.

"Ay, more!" responded Fitz-Maurice; "else why did I forewarn you? Why hem you round with a solemn oath, to guard against one faltering step from a timid spirit, in the final act? But we have not met to talk. Follow me!"

"One word," said Peverell, laying his hand upon the neck of Fitz-Maurice's charger. "Do you know Conrad Geister?"

"What of him?" replied Fitz-Maurice.

"Do you know him?" repeated Peverell.

"I do not know Conrad Geister," answered Fitz-Maurice. "Why do you ask?"

"He is your sworn enemy," replied Peverell—"one who spoke of what you were in the mountains and valleys of Scandinavia—one who sought me this evening in my house, and wasted an hour, or thereabouts, in earnest persuasion, to keep me from coming here."

Mephosto galled his steed with the rein, to make him curvet and plunge towards where Peverell stood.

"For this it was," exclaimed Fitz-Maurice, looking at Mephosto, "that you charmed me into sleep, and left me! You shall groan for it. *filthy thing, ere long.*"—Then, turning to Peverell, he added, "If you remember the words of my letter, you will understand why I honour your noble firmness; and why he that *hath* faith shall have it! But now you are answered—and now let us forward."

Fitz-Maurice moved slowly in the direction of the Abbey; Mephosto followed close behind; the others walked by his side. When the people saw them, they uttered a loud cry, and fled. They could see only the gigantic figure of Fitz-Maurice; his sable ostrich plume waving in the wind; his long black mantle streaming behind; his courser proudly pawing the earth, as he advanced; and Mephosto's hideous form in the rear.—They knew not what it was, and they were dismayed.

As they approached the Abbey, the noises were redoubled. Monstrous shadows reared themselves in threatening attitudes along the walls—the bell tolled, and its beat was like the roaring of cannon—purple and sulphureous flames seemed to burst from the windows—the earth trembled beneath their feet—the rushing winds blew from

every quarter of the heavens:—blazing meteors flashed across the darkened sky—fiery hail fell before them at each step, as if to drive them back—corpse-like faces grinned and chattered around them—unseen, icy hands clasped theirs—night ravens shrieked: toads croaked, and adders hissed: the ground was strewn with loathsome reptiles of all kinds: low, mourning voices smote their ears, crying, “Beware! Beware!” and a fast swelling river of blood, seemed to exhale from the earth, like a moat, before the doors of the Abbey!

Within the portal, itself, stood the Old Man, even as he showed himself on the night when Kit Barnes entered. In his right hand, the arm of which was bared up to the shoulder, he held the crucifix aloft, as then he did; but, instead of flames of fire issuing from it, when he waved it furiously over his head, there appeared the sacred image of the Redeemer, in meek and patient suffering!

At sight of this, Fitz-Maurice stopped; and, elevating his voice above the horrid tumult, exclaimed,—“Behold yon symbol! By its holy power I conjure ye, be men! May the sacred spirit of the host of martyrs inspire you, and animate your hearts! Forward!—and remember!—he who looks behind, makes himself a traitor to the cause he has espoused!”

So saying, he again gave his steed the rein. But at that instant, all was darkness and death-like silence without! Nothing was visible, save the gray stone walls of the fabric, and gleaming lights, that flashed in fitful radiance, through the windows; nothing was audible but a faint stifled cry of woe within! Arrived at the door, Fitz-Maurice sprang from the saddle, and giving his courser to Mephosto, exclaimed, “Tarry for the hour! If I come not, then come not thou, till I bid!”

“*I will tarry,*” croaked Mephosto; “or, at thy mighty bidding, come!”

Fitz-Maurice threw open the doors of the Abbey, and entered, followed by Peverell, Lacy, De Clare, Walwyn, Mortimer, Hoskyns, and Owen Rees. A loud yell, as if proceeding from a thousand iron voices, smote their ears; and then, a horrid laughing burst forth, which seemed to come from above, below, and around them. This was followed by dismal shrieks, which grew fainter and fainter, till at last they subsided into what seemed a funeral

dirge, accompanied by the swelling tones of an organ! As these died away, a solemn stillness prevailed.

The interior was lighted, if light it could be called, with that kind of dusky gloom which is shed over every object, by the descending shadows of evening. The eye could distinguish neither the height, nor the length, nor the breadth, of the aisles. But pale phantoms, in shrouds and winding sheets, and in every stage almost of mortal decay, were visible. Some looked, as if life had just departed—others, with that green and yellow hue, as if they had not lain in the earth a week—some showed incipient rottenness, in the loss of lips, and eyes, and cheeks—others, with the features dissolving into putrid liquefaction—some were brushing away the worms that crawled out of their ears and mouth—and some, more horrible still, seemed to dress up their dry, fleshless bones, in the living characters of thought and passion! On every side, these hideous spectres were seen, sweeping slowly along the air, or gliding upon the ground, or stalking backwards and forwards, with noiseless motion. Sometimes, they would bring their pestiferous faces close; and their smell, was of corruption; but if the up-lifted hand was raised to put them back, it passed through mere vacancy!

At the very entrance, almost, stood the Old Man, with the crucifix held above his head, and glaring like a demon at Fitz-Maurice, while rage, defiance, and scorn, successively dwelt upon his features. His head and feet were bare; his right arm naked to the shoulder; and round his body, an ample purple vest, or robe, confined by a crimson girdle, with a curiously wrought clasp of gold, which fastened beneath the bosom, and flickered to the eye, like gently undulating flame. He did not utter a word; but remained motionless, as if it was his intent to dispute the farther progress of Fitz-Maurice, who also paused for a moment.

As to the feelings of those who were following him, it were in vain to attempt, by any description, to convey a notion of their intensity. Peverell, De Clare, and Lucy, were the only ones of whom it could truly be affirmed, they *felt* no fear: the first, from native intrepidity of character, the second, from disdain—and the third, from habit. Of the other four, it could only be said, they *expressed* none. Walwyn thought of his kinsman's death,

and hardly cared how soon he followed him. Mortimer played with his love-lock, and breathed short. The Welchman kept his hand upon the hilt of his sword, and raising himself upon his toes, essayed to peep over the shoulders of the others, at what might be coming. Hungerford Hoskyns touched him on the elbow, and in a whisper, that partook of something between a groan and a laugh, exclaimed, "I think we are cracking the shell of this business now—keep close, for the love of heaven!"

Fitz-Maurice, calm and undaunted, advanced. The Old Man receded a few paces, but still confronting his adversary. The grim shadows flit about in quicker motion, and become more ghastly. Fitz-Maurice continues to walk slowly onwards, and the Old Man gives way, step by step. The ground rocks and heaves, and the stones cleaving asunder, a deep, dark grave yawns before them! The Old Man points to it, with an air of deriding malignity. Fitz-Maurice bows his head in silence, as he still proceeds. They have all passed the grave. Suddenly, a dismal howl, a long, deep, and melancholy moan, break upon the stillness of the scene.

Again the ground rocks and heaves—again the pavement opens, and another grave gapes beneath their feet! The Old Man points to it, as before. Fitz-Maurice raises his eyes to heaven, and his lips move, as if in prayer. A louder howl, a longer and a deeper moan, are heard; but Fitz-Maurice advances, upon the still retreating footsteps of the Old Man, whose looks betray rage and amazement!

And now, upon the leaden-coloured mist that had hitherto enveloped them, there grew a streaming brightness of saffron-tinted light, which emitted a most noisome odour, and filled the whole surrounding space; but it was too opaque to render visible more than a small portion of it. The Old Man plucked from his golden clasp a part of it, and cast it violently on the ground; when the earth opened with a tremendous noise, and from the rugged chasm ascended sulphureous flames of roaring fire! The blue glare fell upon their faces as they passed, and gave a frightful expression to the convulsed features of the Old Man, who found himself unable to arrest their progress.

He starts—stops—thrusts the cross into his bosom—draws thence a broad sable fillet, inscribed with mystic

characters in silver, which he binds round his head—throws himself upon the ground, and lies motionless for nearly a minute. Fitz-Maurice unsheathes his sword, and springs towards him; but at the moment when his arm is raised to strike, the blade shivers into a thousand pieces, like so much brittle glass, and the Old Man, rising, looks at him with a scoffing air, while he points exultingly, to two more graves which are seen slowly opening before him! As they gradually widen themselves, there appears, in one, the spectre of Kit Barnes, with outstretched arms, gaunt, grim, and terrible! In the other, a dark red fluid, which gives it the semblance of a cistern of blood!

The Old Man stands between them, and by his gestures defies Fitz-Maurice to advance! The defiance avails him nothing. Fitz-Maurice, answering the silent challenge of his adversary only by a placid smile, does advance; and the Old Man, springing back several feet, with a loud scream, tears the fillet from his head. He breathes upon it thrice; then holds it out, and as it melts away, dropping like liquid diamonds on the ground, he utters words of uncouth sound, and trembles violently!

And now, the saffron tinted light which had diffused itself, disappeared; and a thick vapour succeeded, which went on deepening and deepening, till there was total darkness! The eye could distinguish no object, save the grisly phantom shapes, which glided about more brightly horrible through the surrounding gloom. A profound stillness prevailed; no one spoke—no one moved. At length, there appeared along the walls, on each side, and at each end, black, dimly burning tapers, held by skeleton hands. These, as they slowly multiplied, shed a sombre, funereal light upon the whole interior of the Abbey; and the likeness of a marble tomb, of massy structure, and vast dimensions, was visible! The doors were closed; but beside them stood two spectral figures, each with a glittering key, as of burnished gold, in its hand. The portals were surmounted with a white alabaster tablet, upon which appeared the name of BENJAMIN LACY! A few paces behind, was the Old Man, surveying, with an air of seeming triumph, the wondrous scene around him.

Fitz-Maurice, too, surveyed it with an anxious look. For a moment, he appeared irresolute and disconcerted,

while exulting mockery sat scoffing on the Old Man's brow. The bell strikes the first hour of twelve! The presence of a mightier power is confessed, in the writhings and contortions of the Old Man—in the rocking of the walls—in the trembling of the earth—and in the groans that burst from beneath the earth!

Fitz-Maurice advances—he is followed by Peverell—by Lacy! The iron portals of the tomb fly open! Within, reclining on a bier, appears the pale, shrouded form of Lacy's wife—the sainted mother of his Helen! She points to a vacant place by her side, and a solemn voice issues from the sepulchre, crying, "COME!" Lacy staggers towards the tomb, but the Old Man rushes forward—seizes him, and holds him back! A death-like silence reigns.

The chimes have ceased—the twelfth hour has tolled. A loud knock is given at the Abbey door, and the words, "HUSBAND, COME!—THE CROSS IS MINE!" in tones of silvery sweetness, are heard without. Another knock, and again that gentle invocation! A third—and a third time it is pronounced!—The doors roll back their ponderous bulk, and Helen Lacy enters!

"Behold!" exclaimed Fitz-Maurice.

Peverell and Lacy look, and they see the figure of Helen, attired like a bride, in virgin white, and veiled, advancing slowly along. They see ONLY her! But before their tongues can exclaim—"Where is De Clare?—where Walwyn?—where Mortimer?—where Hoskyns?—where Owen Rees?" their unasked questions are fearfully answered. Each grave they had passed is tenanted! And as the shuddering Helen walks towards the altar, each grave heaves to its surface, at her approach, the lifeless and disfigured form of its fresh inhabitant!

Horror and consternation possess the minds of Lacy and Peverell. The latter thinks of all that Conrad Geister said; the former, of all that had fallen from his daughter's lips. He half doubts, half believes, it is she who silently and slowly paces along. He knows not her dress; and her veil conceals her features. He is still in the grasp of the Old Man, at the entrance of the tomb; but his whole and undivided attention is elsewhere. His heart beats high—his mouth is parched—his straining eyes follow the movements of Helen!

Fitz-Maurice, too, gazes upon her! Hope and despair alternately sustain and smite his agitated soul. The Old Man foams with agony and rage, the blackened froth gathering on his lips, as he glares at the spotless maiden, in whose purity of purpose he reads his own damnation! Peverell has his hand upon the arm of Fitz-Maurice, who, with a stern look, imposes silence upon his intrepid follower.

Helen remembered well, and performed nobly, the task enjoined her. She spoke not—she uttered no exclamation—though affrighted almost beyond mortal bearing, by what she saw. With a majestic step, and a lofty air, as if she felt the eye of Heaven were upon her, she advanced towards the altar; and when she stood beneath it, she cast back her veil. Then, for the first time, she saw her father! and a smothered shriek died within her lips, as she beheld the angelic vision of her mother in the tomb beyond! Then, too, Lacy recognised his daughter, and consoling doubts yielded to paternal anguish.

Helen looked at him with radiant eyes: with an ecstatic expression of bliss upon her features, which proclaimed the kindling consciousness of her heart, that she had done well in all she had done, and that now was to be the glad reward of all, in delivering him from his jeopardy. "Oh, that I might speak!" was her silent ejaculation; "and abridge, but by a single moment, the wretchedness that clings to thy noble spirit." She caught one glimpse, too, of the dark, penetrating eye of Fitz-Maurice, and read its language with a proud smile.

She took off the SIGNET; placed it on the altar; knelt—and with such fervid devotion as expiring saints might feel, while the yet struggling soul is preparing for its flight to realms of everlasting bliss, already opening in bright glory to its view, she prayed: "*Forgive me! I know not what I do: but thy will be mine!*" Choral voices catch her words, and hymning strains are heard above, chanting in solemn response, "FORGIVE! FORGIVE!"

She rises—places the signet again upon her finger, and lifts her hand to Heaven, as she looks towards her father. At that moment Lacy speaks.

"Helen! cursed be the arts by which you work! See me perish, and abjure them!"

"See him perish, or abjure them!" screamed forth the Old Man.

"I implore you!" added her father; "begone, and let thy trust be in God alone!"

Helen paused: her arm was still extended—her bosom heaved convulsively—her brain whirled—her knees smote each other—her countenance was awfully sublime—her eyes were fixed in the up-raised expression of intense piety. Fitz-Maurice rushed towards her—knelt, and in the wildest agony of speech exclaimed, "You deny me, then!" These words—that voice—that attitude—that mysterious being, subdued all fear and hesitation. The next moment, "I COMMAND THEE—OBEY!" fell from her lips!

The Old Man, with a loud and terrific yell, quitted his grasp of Lacy, and the two spectral figures which had guarded the doors of the tomb, thrust him in. They close. The Old Man darts to where Helen stands, takes the Cross from his bosom, and lays it on the altar. Instantly the lights vanish, and there is total darkness again! Fires flash around—the blue lightning, in forked wrath, darts through the windows—the volleying thunder bursts, and rebellows, till the deep foundations of the Abbey seem to shake to their bottom—and the fierce wind-storm raves round the walls, like the discordant howlings of the spirits of the abyss!



CHAPTER XXI.

By degrees the deafening tumult subsided, and at last; not a murmur was heard within or without the Abbey. Then it was that Peverell, who had stood motionless all the time, his senses nearly overpowered, perceived above him a small circle of exceeding brightness, from which gradually proceeded a beam of light—at first, no larger than the stem of an olive branch, but, as it descended, expanding itself, till it spread into a flood of soft yellow radiance over the altar.

By its lustre, which completely illumined more than half of the interior, while the whole was rendered par-

tially visible, he saw that himself, Fitz-Maurice, and Helen, were the only living creatures within the walls. All else had disappeared! All that had appalled their eyes had vanished! Where graves had yawned, the smooth pavement spread itself, as if cemented by the lapse of ages. Where the visionary tomb had stretched its cold arms for the gallant veteran, was now unencumbered space; and the murky air, that had so lately been peopled with hideous phantoms, was now suffused with the streaming effulgence of that light by which he was enabled to note these changes.

He looked towards the altar. On its topmost step stood Helen, in the same attitude, with extended arm, one foot advanced, and her head thrown back, as when she pronounced the spell-compelling words. Her eye still bent its gaze upon the spot where she had seen her father; but it was glazed and rayless—the blood had left her cheeks; her half unclosed lips were pale and moved not. The horror of that moment which had thus petrified her, sat grimly visible on every feature; and she appeared only a marble image of that being which was once Helen Lacy. Peverell doubted whether life still lingered in her veins.

At the foot of the steps knelt Fitz-Maurice, in devout, but silent prayer. His hands were clasped, his eyes raised towards the altar, and his countenance, upon which fell the full radiance of the descending light, beaming with holy ecstasy. He seemed absorbed in the vehemence and magnitude of his own feelings. There was an inexpressible degree of dignity and grandeur in his appearance, arising not less from his gigantic stature, his costly sable vestments, his towering ostrich plume, and ample velvet mantle, than from the glow of exalted piety, which spread over his fine and intensely animated features.

Peverell contemplated these two with a mind wholly incapable of reflecting upon what had taken place. His mental faculties were stunned. He knew certain things had happened; but beyond that mere naked assurance of a fact, of which his outward senses of sight and hearing had informed him, he knew nothing. The very loneliness and silence of his present situation appalled him. The world, beyond those walls, was a cipher, a blank, to his imagination at that moment; and within them, He-

len presented herself as a breathing statue only, (if indeed, she did breathe,)—while Fitz-Maurice, who at no time appeared to be touched with human sympathies, now, less than ever, seemed clothed with mortal attributes.

He felt he was ALONE; and the sense of desolation which accompanied that feeling, was, in no degree, mitigated by the reflection that he lived. Nay, in the chaotic tumult of his thoughts, he almost questioned his own identity—he doubted, almost, whether what he now saw was reality, or whether it was not a part of that astounding mystery, whose terrific illusions had passed before him. His eye involuntarily glanced round the Abbey, in search of Mortimer, De Clare, Walwyn, and those other friends who had entered it with him; and he shuddered as his perturbed mind whispered to his heart, “They are gone!”

He was roused from these clouded meditations by a piercing shriek which burst from Helen; as if, at that moment, a sudden consciousness of her situation had broken in upon her in all its overwhelming horrors. She buried her face in her hands, and sunk gently down upon the steps of the altar. Fitz-Maurice sprung from his attitude of devotion, and, raising her up, bore her to a seat, before Peverell had power to move or speak. With a reeling step, and still glancing wildly behind, or from side to side, he approached her; she looked both at him and Fitz-Maurice: but there was evidently no recognition of either.

As Fitz-Maurice bent over her, his long black plume drooped before her. She played with the feathers and smiled, and played and smiled, as a laughing infant would in its nurse’s arms. He put them back; and then she sighed, as if it grieved her to be denied so innocent a pleasure. She spoke not a word. Fitz-Maurice raised her hand to his lips, kissed it, and exclaimed, “Peerless maiden!” what a price hast thou paid down for my ransom!”

She started at the sound of his voice. Its thrilling tones awakened a transient recollection of the past. She slowly lifted her eyes, as though she dreaded to behold the being from whom they had proceeded; gazed at him intently for an instant, and then a vacant laugh overspread her face. But her eye glanced upon the signet,

and hastily withdrawing her hand from Fitz-Maurice, who still held it, she exclaimed, with seeming anger and shame, "Fie upon you! you are naught—I am married now! should my lord know of this, how might he take it of me?" She then laid her hand in her lap, and continued wistfully to gaze at it.

Peverell beheld this scene, not only without emotion, but without once recollecting that the signet which had worked such fatal consequences, was the same which Helen had so mysteriously demanded of him. Fitz-Maurice, who perceived his distraction, led him away from where Helen sat, lost in the stupor of her own griefs, and thus addressed him—

"Marmaduke Peverell! rouse thyself!—summon back thy scattered thoughts, and bend up thy great energies to the task that still awaits thee."

Peverell, like Helen, started at the sound of Fitz-Maurice's voice: but, upon his spirits, it acted like a stone dropped into a dull and stagnant pool, stirring the still waters, and quickening them with motion. His name pronounced by any living tongue, at that moment, would have produced the same effect. He awoke to himself, as if he had suddenly emerged from a long and oppressive dream.

"Rouse myself!" he exclaimed. "Why, where are we? Where——"

"Ay," interrupted Fitz-Maurice, "where are *they*? It is that you would add."

"It is," replied Peverell.

"And you shall be answered," said Fitz-Maurice, sighing deeply, "when ALL is done."

"When ALL is done!" repeated Peverell. "Does there yet remain a thing to be accomplished?"

"There does," said Fitz-Maurice; "and it is you alone must do it."

"Must!" ejaculated Peverell.

"When I say *must*," rejoined Fitz-Maurice, "I would be understood to mean no more than this—that in the universal world, there lives no being, save yourself, who CAN."

"What is it?"

"To know, and to perform," said Fitz-Maurice, "have marked your resolute spirit throughout. Do you remem-

ber this?" he continued, drawing aside his hair, and pointing to the mark upon his forehead.

"I do," said Peverell. "It is the crimson trophy of your victory over the Magician of the Den, when you were in Mauritania."

"So I called it," replied Fitz-Maurice, "when first I sought you as a 'brave man;' as one, 'who had that quality within you, which makes daring a virtue, raising it above the mere display of sinews and quick passion:' as one who, 'when mine own adventure in Mauritania came o'er my mind, made me say in my heart, here is a man to do the like!' But, said I not likewise, when I called this the crimson trophy of my victory, 'there *are* times, indeed, when it seems to burn inwards to my brain: but I know how to quench its fires?'"

"You did," answered Peverell.

"It burns inwards now!" exclaimed Fitz-Maurice, pressing his hand violently upon his brow. "It ever burns! Sometimes with greater, sometimes with less, scorching fierceness."

"And yet you know how to quench its fires!" added Peverell.

"Even so!"

"Then why endure its pangs?"

"Thou noble spirit!" exclaimed Fitz-Maurice, seizing Peverell's hand, "I owe thee much—a vast, vast debt, which my poor thanks can only confess, but never pay. It is *thou* must quench this fire! Thou—and thou alone."

"I!" ejaculated Peverell. "How?"

"Do you see yon altar?" he continued.

Peverell looked, and perceived what he had not before observed, a long black curtain, which descended from the lofty roof of the Abbey, and entirely concealed the whole of the altar, except the steps which led up to it.

"On that altar," said Fitz-Maurice, "lies the Cross which was held in the hand of him who disputed, step by step, our entrance here this night. The moment I possess that holy emblem, in the same moment, I am released from this tormenting trophy. But it is not my hand that can take it thence. It is not *any* hand—but *thine*!"

"Methinks," said Peverell, "it were an easy deed enough, to walk there straight and bring it away. I'll do it! Yon streaming ray of wondrous light will guide me, and when I could talk about it, it shall be done."

"Be undaunted," replied Fitz-Maurice, "and it will be done."

"Undaunted!" exclaimed Peverell, pausing, as he was turning from Fitz-Maurice. "What mean you?"

"You must be neither fore-warned nor fore-armed," said Fitz-Maurice; "but in the oath you have taken, and in the promptings of your own heart, find the motive for the act. I am powerless here."

Peverell hesitated for a moment. It was only a moment. The next, placing his hand in Fitz-Maurice's, he exclaimed with a calm resolute tone,

"By my oath, I swear, and by that which now swells within me—the Cross is thine, or I—am nothing."

He had no sooner uttered these words, than the light which had hitherto shed its lustre upon the altar, and dimly illumined the rest of the Abbey, vanished. He was in total darkness again. But while he was groping his way along, he felt the cool air fan his cheek; and, looking up, could just descry the long black curtain, slowly flapping backwards and forwards. Anon, it seemed to open in the centre, rolling back its heavy folds on each side; and as it opened, a scene of horror grew more and more distinct to his sight.

The communion table appeared covered with a pall; and on it was spread a splendid banquet? Black tapers were burning, held as before, by skeleton hands, and gave forth a red, dusky flame. Seated round this table, he beheld his eleven friends—they who had all perished—in the same habiliments as when living! They spoke not—they moved not! Their aspect was cold and stony! A death-like silence prevailed! Behind each chair, stood pale shadows, as if to wait upon the guests!

Excited, maddened, almost, as Peverell had already been, by the terrific visions of the night, he felt himself hardly able to endure this fresh trial of his resolution. His temples throbbed—his heart palpitated—his bosom heaved with a quicker and quicker respiration—his knees smote each other—and his blood shot through his veins like liquid flames! Silent and motionless, his aching eye-balls bent their gaze upon this withering scene. All around him was so awfully still! So unearthly! So hideous! He looked behind. The gloom was too dense, too impenetrable, to allow of his distinguishing Fitz-Maurice.

though he had as yet scarcely moved half a dozen paces from him. He turned his eyes towards where Helen sat; but the pitchy darkness shrouded her from his view. The tall black tapers threw no light beyond the table—not even sufficient to enable him to discern the steps of the altar. A cold and clammy sweat bedewed his limbs, and he felt an almost frantic inclination to dash himself upon the ground, and so, in desperation, shut out this chilling mockery of what had once been real.

He tried to convince himself that he was fooled by his own heated imagination: that it was a cheat, put upon him by his own eyes; and he drew nearer to the altar. But no! If he ever saw them living, he saw them now! It was impossible to deny that he beheld them.

There sat De Clare with his lip of scorn, and brow of bitter taunt. There, Wilkins, with his fair round face, cold blue eye, and dimpling cheek. There, the fantastic Mortimer, his mustachios newly trimmed, and his love-lock redolent of perfume. There, the gallant Lacy, erect and martial in his veteran figure. There, the pensive, melancholy Vehan, e'en as he looked and sighed, and told of Alice Gray. There, the choleric Welchman, with upturned nose, as if scenting out a quarrel. There, the swart Overbury, scowling like a tempest. There, the gay, good-natured Hungerford Hoskyns. There, the simple-hearted friend, the confiding, honest Clayton? There, the frank, courteous Walwyn. There, mine host, with merry, laughing eye, and comely paunch, looking, as he was wont, proud of the goodly company around him. And there, too, the gaunt figure of the half fanatic, Kit Barnes!

At the top of the table was a vacant chair. At the bottom sat a figure veiled, or, rather, covered to the feet with a sable drapery, so that neither form nor feature was discernible.

Peverell draws nearer. His foot is on the first step. He pauses for a moment, and contemplates this spectral company. Is he awake? Or do they really bend their rayless eyes upon him, and, with a sepulchral smile, invite him to sit? His brain whirls—his sight grows dim! Again he looks, and again they smile a ghastly welcome! He cannot resist! He obeys! He rushes up the steps, and takes his seat! He hears a voice he has heard before,

breathe in his ear, "Welcome! Thou art the last!" He doubts the evidence of his own senses. Clayton sits beside him. He puts his hand upon his. It has a more than icy coldness; and a shivering tremor runs through his veins. He looks round the table. What stony eyes stare upon him!—what marble lips mock at him! He grows dizzy, and exclaims, "Why, then, I'll mock the mockers!"

He rises—and in each cold hand places a crystal cup, into which he pours sparkling wine. He comes to the veiled figure, and he laughs horribly as he places before it a goblet, mantling to the edge. He returns to his seat, pours out a flowing cup, and raises it to his lips—but dashes it from him. It is filled with worms, that crawl and cling to its golden brim! His guests smile, and point to theirs. The worms are heaving and rolling about! The pale shadows which stand behind, advance, and with their fleshless hands remove the loathsome vessels.

"This is brave fare!" exclaims the half frantic Peverell. "Come! eat!" He helps each to costly and delicate viands, and then himself. Toads and adders—lizards—beetles, and spiders—creep, and crawl, and twine about the table, instead of the dainty food he had served. Peverell is covered with them. He starts from his chair, and, as he brushes them off, addresses his spectral friends:

"Will you speak? You, De Clare,—where are your biting taunts—your saucy gibes, and your ready scoff? Mortimer! swear by your manhood you will pledge me! Clayton! I am thy friend—hast *thou* no word for me? Wilkins! thy bags are stored to bursting: lend me! not on usance, but for the vanity of showing thou art rich. Vehan! breathe one sigh—or let me see thee weep, or fold thy arms, and dream of moonlight visions in the silent grove! Wilfrid Overbury! master of the Scorpion!—say thou'lt stab me, as thou didst thy innocent child, an' I cross thee in thy savage humour, when thou art desperate! What! nor eat, nor drink, nor speak! Hence, grim shadows of what you *were*!—hence, horrible visions! Hence! Ay!—now you obey—now you move!—now—How is this? Is it thus you show me what you *are*?"

While he spoke, the seats on which they sat, changed into the semblance of coffins! In each was a corpse! Their vestments had fallen from them; and they now stood

round the table in their grave clothes—yea, in their shrouds, and in their winding sheets!

The veiled figure still remained, and Peverell seemed to see only it. There was something even more terrible to his imagination in its silent mystery, and hidden form, than in all the visible horror by which he was surrounded. He knew not what it might portend, nor for what it tarried. He arose: and it stood up at the same time! He moved; and it moved towards him!

“What art thou?” he exclaimed.

“Ask even at the twelfth hour, and Conrad Geister will not deny thee,” said a voice.

“What should I ask?”

“To close thine eyes in sleep till sunrise,” replied the voice.

Peverell slowly turned his head. The voice did not seem to issue from the veiled figure, but from lips that were near him. He looked, and there was no one!

He paused. His agitation was excessive. He felt that he could endure the conflict with himself no longer. All consciousness of where he was, and wherefore he had approached the altar, was fast departing from him. At that moment his eye fell upon the Cross, and he saw a halo, or faint roseate light, encircling the image of the Redeemer, which it still bore. It surrounded it like a glory. A sudden recollection flashed across his mind. The veiled figure is between him and the Cross. He advances to take it. The veiled figure advances too, and stands before him.

“What art thou?” again exclaimed Peverell.

Its black drapery falls, and Peverell beholds the pale likeness of DEATH! The grim anatomy brandishes his spear; the coffined spectres gibber, and their bones rattle—the attendant shadows glide about! Peverell presses forward; the upraised spear is levelled; Peverell hesitates, and Fitz-Maurice is seen ascending the steps of the altar. The bones drop with a hideous clattering from the phantom, and the Old Man appears! His gleaming eyes are two flaming torches; his hot breath, the blasts from a furnace; his livid face, the speaking agonies of a tortured fiend; and in his hand he grasped a shining scimitar, which flickered like the nimble lightning that

shoots athwart the heavens, swift harbinger of the gathering tempest.

"Slave of thy fate!" he roars, glaring fiercely at Fitz-Maurice, and shaking the massive walls of the Abbey with his voice; "Vassal of my power! What darest thou yet? Avaunt!"

Fitz-Maurice points to the Cross, and in solemn tone repeats the words of Peverell. "By my oath I swear, and by that which now swells within me, the Cross is thine, or I—am nothing!"

Peverell hears the words. With collected strength, with all the energy of mind and body that yet remains to him, he dashes forward—seizes the Cross—and staggers towards Fitz-Maurice, who snatches the holy symbol from his hand, exclaiming, as he clutches it, "BY THIS I TRIUMPH!—PERISH, UNCLEAN SPIRIT!"

A loud and dismal yell, and piercing shrieks that might have awakened the dead, were all that Peverell remembered after; for, as he felt the Cross pass from his relaxing grasp to the eager gripe of Fitz-Maurice, his sight thickened, his limbs refused their office, and he sunk to the earth, exhausted by the sharp trials he had undergone.



CHAPTER XXII.

WITH returning consciousness, came returning wonders. When Peverell unclosed his eyes, he found himself still in the Abbey, but alone. And he was seated at a table, round which were ranged twelve empty chairs. The table was exactly in the same place, spread with the same kind of viands and wines, and lighted with the same number of waxen tapers, as when the mayor used to provide fit reception for them, on those fearful nights, the remembrance of which now presented itself to his mind like the fragments of a half-forgotten dream. The taking of the cross—the voice of Fitz-Maurice, as he slowly ascended the steps of the altar, and repeated his own em-

phatic words—the veiled figure, with its appalling changes the abhorred mockery of the banquet—the vision of his eleven friends, and all its portentous ghastliness—the form of Helen Lacy,—a babbling idiot, like a rich casket, robbed of its master gem, but still rare and beautiful for its workmanship—the terrible array of unearthly power, that preceded her entrance,—all passed in dim and rapid succession before him. In vain he strove to disentangle his bewildered ideas; his mind was too feverish, too sensitive, to bear the retrospect. At every step, some hideous recollection started forth, in hues of such vivid reality, that the agony of remembering what had been, was surpassed only by the suffering of it.

He remained in this state of stupor for several minutes, languid alike, in body, and in mind, and rendered still more so, by the oppressive sense of that profound silence, and of that total solitude, which surrounded him. The thought that he *was* alone—the only living witness of miracles and events, whose mighty origin and unrevealed purpose, had eluded his grasp, like shadows—filled him with sadness. Why had it so chanced? Or, if not the work of chance, why had it been so ordered? Why was he singled out, to float a little longer on the stream of life, that men might point at him, as the sole relic of a gallant bark, which had gone to pieces in the rough tempest of a strange, unfathomable mystery?

While thus ruminating, he cast his eyes, with a timid glance, round the Abbey; when they were suddenly fixed in amazement upon an object which seemed the visible annunciation of his own secret and troubled thoughts.

There appeared, stretching from side to side, the semblance of a broad belt of azure light, with edges, formed of thin, vapoury clouds, whose swelling folds reflected a crimson glow, like those of heaven when tinged with the first beams of the morning. Athwart this belt, and occupying its whole extent, were these words, traced in gigantic letters of vivid flame, whose flickering brightness dazzled the sight:

“THOU ART THE LAST!”

Peverell gazed, but he uttered no exclamation. Still

he gazed, and still the wondrous scroll, terrible in its truth, shone with mysterious radiance before his eyes. It was as if the incorporeal air had shaped itself into this silent record of what he was: or, rather, as if the whole invisible space bore the miserable tidings; for wherever he turned his look—on the right or on the left, above, or below, before or behind—there gleamed this azure belt, with its words of lambent fire. It was every where, yet never multiplied; always one and the same; seeming to wait with nimble and miraculous obedience upon each quick motion of Peverell's eye, as if created by that motion, rather than discovered by it only.

"I am, indeed, the last!" he exclaimed, with a grieved spirit, and covering his face with his mantle as he spoke.

There was something in the sound of even his own voice, thus giving utterance to his feelings of desolation, in the very place where that desolation had been produced, and where it then reigned in awful stillness around him, which weighed heavily upon his heart. But more heavily still was it oppressed, when he heard, in the low, stifled tones of a funeral chant, or solemn requiem for the dead, these sad words, breathed with a mournful cadence from every part of the Abbey at once, and echoed back, in fainter and fainter notes, from the altar. While listening to the dirge-like strains, and subdued, even to tears, by their melancholy character, they gradually died away; and then, there arose a voice of liquid sweetness and thrilling melody, such as might belong to what we deem of celestial minstrelsy, warbling in the air, to the responsive beat of fluttering wings. And this was its song of hope and gladness:—

Lonely mourner! though the last,
All thy trials now are past!
Man of grief! look up and see
Silent friends who look on thee!
Spell-bound, but in spell so weak,
That speak to each, and each shall speak.

Peverell raised his head—the mantle fell from his face—and he beheld, with emotions bordering upon frenzy, the table filled! Yes; once more he gazed upon Mortimer,

upon De Clare, upon his friend Clayton, upon Lacy, Walswyn, and Vehan, upon the ferocious Overbury, upon Owen Rees, upon Hungerford Hoskyns, Wilkins, and mine host! Each sat in the place he had been wont to occupy, and each bent his eyes upon the amazed Peverell, whose sight grew dizzy, and whose brain reeled with the memory of past horrors, which his staggering mind pictured to him as now about to be acted over again. His first impulse was to fly; but some secret power chained him to the spot, and he felt himself as helpless as infancy, when he strove to move. Speak he could not. His eyes glanced, with a wild and hurried look, first upon one, and then upon another; and still where'er they turned, they met the fixed, silent gaze of all. Oh! that fixed and silent gaze! That mute and earnest look! It was horrible! Yet it was all that partook of horror; for they had no longer the stony glare, or the marble-like aspect, which froze his blood before. There was motion in their eyes, and life upon their cheeks; there was the vital heaving of their manly bosoms; and their lips had a ruby freshness of colour. But they spoke not—they moved not; and all else that proclaimed them mortal, wanting these attributes of living man, only served to shed a more appalling character over their appearance. Why were they there, seeming things of life, if, like shadows, they had no voice nor motion, to give the lie to fears that denied their seeming? At times, too, their eloquent eyes grew lustrous with thought, as though their minds laboured with intellectual conceptions, to which their tongues would fain give birth, but could not.

Next to Peverell was seated Clayton, the friend he had loved—the friend he still mourned. His hand rested on the table. With a dubious feeling, he gently placed his own upon it. It was warm!

“How is this?” he involuntarily exclaimed,—“how is this? I saw him dying: I saw him dead! And now—Oh, it cannot be! I am fooled to madness! Or all that has been, has been a dream, and my waking senses are still struggling in the thrall of a night vision.” Then, fixing his eyes upon Clayton, with a frightful expression, as dreading more the being undeceived, than the continu-

ing in his delusion, he exclaimed, in a voice of forced loudness, "If that thou livest, speak! Here is my hand! Take it, Hugh Clayton, if thou art what thou seemest!"

Peverell had no sooner uttered the words, than Clayton, turning towards him, observed,

"I profess myself no judge of metre, like your trained scholar; but I am marvellously well pleased with this ballad of Alice Gray!"

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Peverell, "he speaks?"

Clayton, in his turn, looked with astonishment upon Peverell, and then round the table, as if to learn from the others the cause of that terror and amazement which sat upon the countenance of his friend. His eyes met those of Wilkins.

"Now, preserve me!" he exclaimed, catching hold of Peverell's arm. "Do you see? As I am a Christian man, and a true Catholic, there sits poor Walter Wilkins who is dead!"

"Dead!" ejaculated Peverell. "Dead! Who is dead? You—you! No—no! my dream is past. I have been sick, and dreamed strange things. But *you* are alive! I see it—I feel it—I hear it! and Walter Wilkins, too, who looks upon me with that honest face—he is alive, for lo! he wraps his cloak about him, and now his lips unclose, to tell me I alone have slept, and am awake."

Even as he said, it was. At the pronouncing of his name, by Peverell, Wilkins folded himself closely in his mantle, and spoke. "By the mass, gentlemen, I know not how you feel, but I have not recovered yet from the freezing darkness which followed that balmy roseate atmosphere of delicious fragrance. Whew! I verily think it hath congealed the marrow in my back bone."

"Verily, I think the marrow in all my bones is congealed," said Clayton, in a whisper, to Peverell. "I wish he would go away again—I don't covet speech with him—or—oh! What is it shakes you so, Master Peverell, and why do you look upon me so crazedly?"

"Hush!" replied Peverell, and once more he placed his hand on Clayton's, while, with his eyes, he scanned him from head to foot. Then he looked at Wilkins; then at the rest, whose fixed attitudes and silent gaze were still the same; and then, sinking into profound abstrac-

tion, he exclaimed, "Oh! this vile treachery of the senses! Whither will it lead me?" The next moment, as if he could no longer endure the maddening ambiguity, he started up, and wildly filling out a cup of wine, cried aloud, while raising it to his lips, "Vehan! De Clare! Mortimer! Walwyn! you, Hungerford Hoskyns—and you, Owen Rees!—my throat is parched—my tongue cleaves to my mouth—rise, if thou canst, as I do, and ere I grow frantic—pledge me!"

They all rose! and, pouring out wine, they drank to Peverell, who, with a convulsive laugh, dashed the goblet he held in his hand to the ground, sunk into his chair, and exclaimed, in a voice almost suffocated with terror, "Shall the grave cast forth its dead, and shall the heart of him who beholds it, not tremble at the sight?"

A different scene now ensued. Walwyn, when he saw his beloved kinsman, Vehan, standing before him, rushed forwards, and threw himself into his arms, mingling with his embraces, broken sentences of doubt, of joy, and of surprise; as his mind, in rapid succession, questioned whether he indeed lived, rejoiced in the belief that he did, and was bewildered by the miracle, if it were one. Vehan, who was wholly unconscious of the cause of this perturbation in Walwyn, gently disengaged himself, and fixed his eyes in silent astonishment upon Wilkins and Clayton, wondering at *their* presence; while De Clare, Mortimer, Owen Rees, Hoskyns, and Walwyn, looked not only upon them and Vehan, but upon Wilfrid Overbury, and upon mine host, with equal amazement. Wilkins alone discovered nothing to move his wonder, except the wondering faces of those around him; and Clayton would have found himself in exactly the same situation, if Wilkins had been away.

In the midst of these inexplicable mysteries and disquieting recollections, and during some brief conversation, which was carried on with the most perplexing confusion of time, circumstances, and personal identity, the situation of Peverell had entirely escaped their observation. He sat, leaning back in his chair, with his arms folded, his brow contracted, and his eyes wandering from one to the other, while his now calm and pallid countenance indicated that he was surveying, with an untrou-

bled spirit, a scene which had ceased to distract, though it continued to engross his thoughts. He could no longer doubt the reality of what he saw; but confounded, as he might well be, by the reality, still it was far, far less appalling than that mockery of life, that animated death, with which his disturbed imagination had first clothed them. There was no comprehensible agency of this world that could explain the mystery; but his mind, having subsided into that state of healthful action by which he was enabled to recognise it as a mystery, and not as a phantasma, the violent agitation of his feelings gradually diminished. He heard them speak, and their voices fell upon his ear in tones that were familiar to it; he beheld them, and they looked and moved as he had ever seen them look and move. It was evident, however, that though his conviction of reality was slowly strengthening itself, there still remained upon his fancy a vivid impression of the fearful images by which it had been haunted; and the inward struggle it produced was so visibly charactered in his countenance and manner, that it attracted the greater notice, because strongly contrasted with what had hitherto been his remarkable firmness and equanimity.

"It surprises me not," remarked De Clare, in reply to an observation of Walwyn: "for you shall ever note, that those natures which, like the pliant willow, bend to the gusts of fortune, rear themselves again when the storm hath passed over; but the stubborn oak, which defies the blast, and disdains to crouch, or triumphs o'er the tempest's fury, or falls a noble ruin, o'erthrown by force greater than its own. We all have seen how this manly creature scorned the assaults which struck down feeble things; but sure I am, that what this night hath chanced might well uproot even him!"

"By my manhood," rejoined Mortimer, "it was enough to uproot the Abbey itself, and bring it toppling about our ears. I protest, and blush not at the avowal, that at one time I would have given any part of my body, save my head, to know, of a certainty, that I should save all the rest."

"And you might have given your head," replied De Clare, "and been the richer by the gift; for what we use

not, is that we want not; and what we want not, only stands in the way of something better which it would be profitable to have.

"As thou dost now," retorted Mortimer.

"Your proof, good Signior Lackwit," said De Clare.

"It lies in the housewife's proverb," answered Mortimer. "The honey of the working bee is better than the sting of the angry wasp."

"Do you observe," interrupted Owen Rees, "what enchantments, and necromancies, and magics, and sorceries, still encompass us? If I am not lunatic, mark you, there sits mine host, and there, opposite him, the master of the Scorpion—and there—

"The master of the Scorpion!" exclaimed Clayton; "by my troth, and thou art lunatic, I ween; for who among us knoweth of a master of the Scorpion?"

The Welchman looked at Clayton, and shook his head. The rest, too, eyed him with so strange a scrutiny, that Clayton began to examine himself, thinking there must needs be some disorder in his apparel which attracted their notice. But he discovered nothing; and then he addressed Vehan, with an inquiry about Alice Gray, and what the men wanted with her. Vehan merely shrugged up his shoulders, while he ejaculated with a sigh, "Cross me thus in a church-yard, by the pale moon-light, and my spirit shall court thy discourse; for it loves to mingle with the shadows of the tomb!"

"Did you hear that?" observed Owen Rees, in a whisper to Hoskyns; while Clayton, pointing to his head, remarked significantly to Walwyn, "I always thought it would come to this!"

"Yes," replied Hoskyns, in answer to the Welchman's question, "I did observe it; and something better, I trow, than you observed me erewhile, when we entered the Abbey; for though I implored you, for the love of God, to keep close to me, as we were cracking the shell of this business, the next moment you were gone."

"I!" said Rees.

"Ay, you; and, by my faith, you must have been as fleet as the roe to get so nimbly to this well-spread board."

"Now you mention it," quoth Owen, "I do remember me of such a speech; but," he continued, with a look of

growing astonishment, "an' I added thereto, that I remember me as truly how I found my way to this well-spread board you talk of, I should most villanously belie my memory, mark you."

"How?" replied Hoskyns, "why——"

"Why," interrupted Peverell, in a solemn tone, who had noted the latter part of this conversation, "as a blind man treads an unknown path—by the guiding hand of another! Before heaven! I proclaim myself blind, even to utter darkness, in this mystery. My reason breaks down under the burden imposed upon it, while my senses mock me with things at once impossible of belief, and of denial. What it is I mean, none of you can know; for none of you have been my companions in all that I have witnessed; yet there be some," (and he looked earnestly at De Clare, Mortimer, and those who had entered the Abbey with him that night,) "who *can* understand me?"

"There be, indeed, some of us," observed De Clare, "who read the same page as yourself in this strange volume; who, like yourself, have silent thoughts for wonders, which the tongue can put into no form of words. But what it is you aim at when——"

"Peace, peace!" exclaimed Peverell. "For the love of heaven, touch not that string, if you would spare me torture and madness. There may be a time, hereafter, perchance, for such discourse; and then we will confer like men, upon matters that could not now be talked of but as children prattle of their nurses' tales, with most devout belief and simple faith. For, look you there! There sits one, whom, if I live myself, I saw, myself, stretched in death, most foully murdered: and there another, whom not mine own eyes only beheld reel to the earth, in frantic agony at the revelation of his crimes. Yet, who shall say, they are no longer of this world? Behold! I but breathe their names—my lips no sooner pronounce Wilfrid Overbury, and John Wintour, than—ay! e'en as you see—the life that is in them starts into motion!"

At that moment, Overbury, who had hitherto sat in grim similitude of what he appeared on the night when the phantom ship, and the withering denunciation of Fitz-Maurice, blasted his eyes and ears, suddenly sprung from his chair, and with a wild and haggard countenance

gazed round the Abbey, as if he expected still to see the visionary scene. And then he scowled, with a darker and fiercer malignity than usual, upon those who were about him, conscious that the lurking secret of his heart had been dragged forth; while his very flesh seemed to quiver, as he caught a glimpse of the persons of Vehan, Clayton, and Wilkins.

As to mine host, it was easy to perceive he was sorely perplexed, listening to a sharp debate with himself, in which the probabilities of his own bed at The Rose being transformed into the Abbey, constituted the prominent topic; albeit there were certain recollections, too, whereof the kind-hearted Lacy was the principal object. For it so happened, that John Wintour had lain his head upon his pillow that night, with a firm determination to ride to Dunstable the next morning, and then and there to be either suddenly seized with a grievous sickness, or, in some other way, unexpectedly detained, till the term assigned by Fitz-Maurice for continuing their watchings, had elapsed. This said determination was what he now distinctly remembered: but finding himself in the Abbey, and *not* remembering how he came there, he, very naturally, began to conclude, that his intended journey to Dunstable was some dream he had had. Observing, however, Wilfrid Overbury seated opposite to him, his perplexity was greatly increased; for he thought it impossible that his returning to the Abbey with the keys, and calling upon him to come forth, were also only dreams.

With a view to settle this point at once, he gave a friendly nod to Overbury, and observed, "I suppose you know that I came back to look for you last night—I mean just now—that is, before we *all* came back again, you know; after that poor gentleman, Master Philip Vehan—now preserve me! there he is! and, as I have a soul to save, Master Clayton, and Master Wilkins, too!—I crave your pardon—it couldn't be I who came back, because I was in bed, and went to Dunstable, and did not return till it was all over. Oh, what's the matter with me? I am not in the Abbey, am I?"

There was a terrific expression of fear and ferocity in Overbury's countenance, while mine host was speaking. He had the awe upon him of listening to one, whom he

almost considered, despite appearances, as addressing him in accents from the tomb; and he was surrounded by others, whose presence, at that moment, inspired a similar belief of their spectral character. There were those, too, before whom he felt that he now stood in all the hideous nakedness of his hitherto concealed crimes. But, amid all these feelings, he was not slow to suspect that Wintour might perhaps be gibing at him, upon the subject of the trick, which he still considered had been played upon him, when he was locked in the Abbey. Darting, therefore, a fierce look at mine host, while his quivering lip betrayed emotions of a far different character, he exclaimed—

“I am not hunted down yet; though that thing of hell, Fitz-Maurice, cried havoc! and let loose all his fiends to worry me. Then beware! for what that devilish magician could not do, ’twill be perilous for such a gad-fly as yourself to attempt.”

Wintour made no reply. His homely wits, indeed, were so scared by what he saw, and what he saw so entirely engrossed the few thoughts he could call his own, that Overbury’s menace, if it reached his ears, certainly found no entrance there to his mind.

“It would be mercy,” said Peverell, rising from his seat, “to leave that noble heart in its death-like slumber; for when it wakes, a grief wakes with it, that will pull at its strings till they break. But it may not be! Mine office is decreed; and must be fulfilled.”

So saying, he advanced with a slow and feeble step towards the farther end of the table, where Lacy was sitting, in the same attitude, and with the same aspect, which they all wore when Peverell first looked upon them. He laid his hand upon his shoulder, and in a voice which had recovered much of its wonted firmness, he exclaimed, in the words of comfort which had descended upon his own troubled spirit, “Benjamin Lacy! thou gallant soldier!

“Look up, and see
Silent friends, who look on thee!”

The spell-bound veteran, released from the charm that had held all his faculties of mind and body suspended, covered his eyes with his hand for a moment; and

then, looking earnestly at Peverell, he said, "You saw it all! Where is my daughter? where is Helen? and where is Fitz-Maurice?"

Before Peverell could reply, strains of solemn music were heard. The Abbey shone with a pale, silvery light, through which its gray stone walls, and ponderous arches, seemed to rear themselves in larger bulk, like rocky heights half obscured by mist; while a transparent vapour, curling away in purple wreaths from the altar, discovered the forms of Helen Lacy and Fitz-Maurice! Helen was sitting, as Peverell had last seen her, gazing wistfully at that signet, which had married her to idiotcy; and her ashy features were overspread with a cold, melancholy smile, like a fair region, in its pride of summer, despoiled of its loveliness by the sudden coming of a wintry storm. Fitz-Maurice stood by her side; but he was no longer clothed in his sable vestments. His flowing mantle, and his towering plume, were exchanged for the bright armour of a steel-clad Knight of The Cross, with his mail of chain, his gauntlets, his pavache shield, his casque, and mighty two-hand sword. Suspended from a crimson baldric, of costly texture, was that holy emblem of our Saviour's crucifixion, which Peverell had taken from the altar, and placed within his hands. He looked at Helen, and his countenance brightened with a fervent expression of mingled piety, gratitude and joy.

Familiar as they had all been with scenes of surpassing wonder, there was something so calm, so holy, so celestial in this, that they gazed upon it in silent ecstasy. Lacy deemed it but a vision; and the tears trickled down his cheeks, as he beheld what he believed to be the shadowy semblance, only, of his for ever lost child. Overbury looked at Fitz-Maurice, and the very chair he sat on shook beneath the trembling of his body.

The strains of aerial melody ceased. The silvery light deepened into a brighter radiance.

"Approach!" exclaimed Fitz-Maurice.

All except Overbury advanced slowly towards the altar. He attempted to rise, but his limbs denied him their support. Lacy leaned, with a tottering step, upon the arm of Peverell.

"The crowning moment of my triumph," said Fitz-

Maurice,—“the last and best reward of all is at hand. Forbear!” he continued, addressing himself to Lacy, whom he perceived about to rush into the arms of his daughter. “A gentler course shall dry those tears, old man, and make thee again a happy father. Helen Lacy! Behold—she hears me not. Oh! but there is a voice—that voice which blessed her, many a time and oft, a nursing in her mother’s arms—that voice, which never since hath fallen upon her ear, save in the quickening accents of a self-begetting love, of an unchanged and unchangeable tenderness—let but that sacred voice reach her, and, from the inmost depth of her now blighted heart, she will answer it in gladness!”

Lacy drew nearer to his daughter. In a low faltering tone, he pronounced her name.

Helen looked up. It was beautiful to see how returning thought and consciousness gradually chased, from her pale features, and from her dull dark eyes, the vacant smile, and the fixed unmeaning stare; and how their wonted energy and expression stole perceptibly over her countenance, lighting it up with the character of intellectual life, even as a pleasant landscape unveils itself to the sight, when the blue mists of an autumnal morning, covering the earth like an out-spread mantle of sleeping waters, melt away in the beams of the rising sun.

At length, she recognised Lacy; and then, with one wild, piercing scream, she started up. “Father! father!” was all she said, as she flung her arms round his neck, in a paroxysm of delirious joy, and found sweet consolation in weeping upon his bosom!

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FEW moments were allowed for the indulgence of nature's holiest emotions; when Fitz-Maurice, leading the way, they all returned to the table, filled, if possible, with feelings of amazement, greater than had been excited by any of the preceding incidents in this marvellous drama. It is certain, at least, that, individually, those feelings were more intense, except in the case of Wilkins; because, as regarded all the rest, there were circumstances of unexplained, and, seemingly, of inexplicable mystery, which were multiplied, at each remove from the trance of Clayton, till they reached their climax in the trials that Peverell had singly undergone. What next might happen, scarcely found a place in their thoughts, so entirely were their minds overwhelmed by what had happened. They took their seats in silence, Helen Lacy clinging to her father for support and protection, and surveying, with quick glances of her still dewy eyes, the martial figure of Fitz-Maurice, who stood by her side. His noble port, and his now warrior-like appearance; his glittering armour, which flashed in radiance from its polished surface, at every movement of his body; and the serene expression of a great triumph, which dwelt upon his countenance, were finely contrasted with the plainer habiliments, and the more anxious features of those who were gazing at him.

"It were strange," said he, after a lengthened pause, "if the conflict with yourselves were other than I see it in your looks. On every tongue, there are a thousand questions, ready for utterance—in every eye there dwells an impatient spirit, eager to be answered. Each of ye, save you, Marmaduke Peverell, and you, Helen Lacy, hath passed through the valley of the shadow of death! Doth this amaze ye? It may amaze thee more to learn, that this heroical maiden, and that undaunted man, inspired of Heaven—for earthly promptings had been too weak—have been to ye angels of life, conducting ye back

to this fair world, and to the blessed light of day. Oh, my friends! You may remember with what vehement earnestness, by what solemn injunctions, I implored you to go on, when once you had begun,—and how that earnestness, and those injunctions grew more vehement, became more solemn, at each step you took. More than then I did, my dark destiny forbad. But you had faith, and you are rewarded! What hath been your reward—what your faith hath done for yourselves and for me—what my fate must have remained, and what yours must have become, fainting in your trials, prepare to know. My promise was given to him, with whom I first communed, in the unravelling of this great mystery; and it hath been renewed to yourselves. It shall be redeemed.—Listen, while I reveal wonders! Listen, but question me not, while, with a fearful spirit, I invoke the memory of the past. It will be yours to discourse with one another of what I tell, when I shall no longer be among you.” He paused for a moment; and then continued:

“ I HAVE LIVED THREE HUNDRED YEARS!

In that time—in all that time, I have never seen the glorious sun descend, but followed still its rolling course through the regions of illimitable space. I have shivered on the frozen mountains of the icy north, and fainted beneath the sultry skies of the blazing east: the swift winds have been my viewless chariot, and on their careering wings I have been hurried from clime to clime. But, nor light, nor air, nor heat, nor cold, have been to me as to the rest of my species; for I was doomed to find in their extremes a perpetual torment. I howled, under the sharp, pinching pangs of the icy north; I panted with agony, in the scorching fervour of the blazing east; and when mine eyes have ached, with vain efforts, to pierce the darkness of the earth’s centre, they have been suddenly blasted with excessive and intolerable light.

“ All the currents of human affection—all, that makes the past delightful, the present lovely, and the future coveted, were dried up within me. My heart was like the sands of the desert, parched and barren. No living scream of hope, of gladness, or of desire, quickened it with

human sympathies. It was a bleak and withered region, the fit abode of ever-during sorrow and comfortless despair. I was as a blighted tree, that perishes not at the root, but is withered in all its branches. Tears, I had none. One gracious drop, falling from my seared orbs, would have been the blessed channel of pent-up griefs that seemed to crush my almost frenzied brain. Sighs, I breathed not. They would have heaved from my bursting heart some of that misery, which loaded it to anguish. Sleep never came. I was denied the common luxury of the common wretched, to lose, in its sweet oblivion, its brief forgetfulness, the sense of what I was. Death, natural death, closed his many doors against me. All that lived, except myself,—the persecuted, the weary, and the heavily laden of man's race,—could find a grave! I, alone, looked upon the earth, and felt that it had no resting place for me! Oh! what a forlorn and miserable creature is man, when, in his affliction, he cannot say to the worm, I shall be yours! I might have cast away, indeed, the YENARKON—the Giver of Life—the elixir of the Sibyl—but that would have been to subject myself to a power of darkness, in whose fell wrath I should have suffered the casting away of mine eternal soul!

“Thus, the stream of time rolled on, burying beneath its dark waves, our little span of present, in the huge ocean of a perpetual past, and devouring, as the food of both, our swift decaying future. But I floated on its surface, and beheld whole generations flourish and fade away, while age and silver hairs, growing infirmities, and the closing sigh that ends them all, mocked me with a horrible exemption. I remained, and might have remained, for ages yet to come, the fixed and unaltered image of what I was, when in Mauritania I encountered the potent Amaimon, the damned Magician of the Den, but for that—woman's faith, and man's fidelity—which have made me what I AM!

“This *was* my destiny. Now mark, how I became enthralled to it; and how it befell, that at last I shook it off, and found redemption.

“In my middle manhood, when scarcely forty summers had glowed within my veins, I left my native Italy, and journeyed to the Holy Land, upon the strict vow of a

self-imposed penance. It was for no sin committed in my days of youth, but for the satisfaction of an ardent piety, and the growing spirit of a long enkindled devotion. I had patrimonial wealth in Apulia; I had kindred; I had friends. I renounced them all, to dedicate myself, thenceforth, to the service of THE CROSS. My purpose was blessed, by a virtuous mother's prayers, that I might approve myself a worthy soldier of Christ; and it was sanctified by a holy priest at the altar.

"Even now, the recollection is strong within me, of the feelings with which, as the rising sun illumined the tops of the surrounding hills, I approached the once glorious, and still sacred, city of Jerusalem—that chosen seat of the Godhead—that Queen among the nations. Eclipsed, though it was, and its majestic head trodden into the dust, by the foot of the infidel, my gladdened eyes dwelt upon what was imperishable, and my wrapt imagination pictured what was destroyed. The valleys of Jehosaphat and Gehinnon, Mount Calvary, Mount Zion, and Mount Acra, stretched before me. The palace of King Herod, with its sumptuous halls of marble and of gold—the gorgeous temple of Solomon—the lofty towers of Phaseolus and Mariamne—the palace of the Maccabees—the Hippodrome—the houses of many of the prophets—grew into existence again, beneath the creative force of fancy. I stood and wept. I knelt, and kissed the consecrated earth which once a Saviour trod.

"I fulfilled my vow. Within a month, I became a soldier of Christ. I was ordained a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre.—I knelt before the entrance of the tomb.—I swore the oath of loyalty, of virtue, and of valour—of piety, of hospitality, and of the redemption of captives—and I held within my hands the sword of the renowned Godfrey of Boulogne.

"Thus appointed, I longed to signalize my zeal, and I craved some enterprise of great peril, befitting the high calling to which I had devoted myself. Then it was, I learned that three hundred years before, a precious relic had been purloined from the Temple of the Sepulchre: yea, even from that part of it, at the eastern end, beneath the spacious arched concave, which marks the hallowed place whereon our Saviour suffered. Hence, in an evil

hour, was stolen, by a sacrilegious caitiff, who knelt in seeming adoration before it, while penitential groans burst from his dissembling heart, the crucifix, vouched by the sacred tradition of ages, as being wrought by holy hands, from the wood of that which the pious Empress Helena caused to be revealed, where it had lain buried for three centuries; and whose identity, as the true cross, she had verified, in curing, by the touch thereof, a noble lady of Jerusalem afflicted with a grievous malady.

“For many years it was believed that the spoiler had bereaved the Temple of the Sepulchre of its gem, only to enrich some other shrine; but at length it was disclosed, in a dream to Gaudentius, then Bishop of Jerusalem, and a man of rare sanctity, that the holy relic had been taken by the dark spirit AMAIMON, who stole into the sanctuary in pilgrim’s weeds, and bore it away. He alone, of all the fiends that roam over this fair earth, had power to subdue its influence, and arm himself against it. He alone could couple the miracles of Heaven, with the potent spells of the lower world. His mother was an enchantress; and she had given him skill to touch, unarmed, that from which every other slave of hell flees howling. Possessed of this prize, he triumphed in such arts by its aid, as made him the scourge of the human race. He prowled from region to region, infected every kingdom with his presence, and walked the universal world, a grim monarch, whose path might be tracked by blood and pestilence, by famine, death, and horror.

“Each knight of the Holy Sepulchre, at the time of being ordained such, was told, after taking the oath which bound him to the performance of manifold Christian duties, that there remained *one*, to be attempted only by an undaunted follower of the Cross, and to be disclosed, only to those who should first swear to undertake it. Many a gallant heart quitted Jerusalem, sworn to return with the crucifix redeemed, or perish in the enterprise. Alas! they were permitted to accomplish only the latter condition; and even, as I told *thee*, Marmaduke Peverell, when first we held discourse together, their bones whitened the ground in front of the grave, and their flesh fattened the monster which guarded its mouth.

“I eagerly coveted this unknown peril, whose very

mystery fired my imagination; and when it was no longer unknown, I coveted it the more. I went through the prescribed ceremonies; knelt before the altar of the holy cross, clothed in a long loose garment; holding in my hand a taper of white wax; in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, I received my sword—was solemnly girt with a belt—had my spurs fastened on—took the sacrament, and repeated daily, from one lunar crescent, till another appeared in the heavens, a hundred and fifty paternosters, for such as had been already slain in this new crusade.

“It chanced, that, in my youth, I knew a famous exorcist. You may remember how I charactered him that night I sat with you here, and spoke not, till a vision that amazed you all had passed away. He was, as I then told you, one who wrought subtle charms, but ever for benign purposes; one, who, by his powerful art, could confound the fiends of the lower world when they infected this. He had taught me much; but all I knew from him, or by silent study of my own, equalled not a tithe of his wondrous skill. His name, BARBAZON—his abode, a little rocky island, near to Lesbos. I quitted Jerusalem; embarked on board an argosy of Venice; and ere the sun had three times sunk beneath the western wave, I sat at the feet of the venerable seer, beneath the shade of the olive and the fig-trees which over-arched the entrance to his cave.

“When he learned my errand, his brow darkened with prophetic sorrow. Potent as he was, Amaimon confessed not his power; nor the power of any single spell or charm that he could command. But the good old man applauded my resolve; and the silver moon was high in the heavens, attended by a countless host of glittering stars, ere I ceased to listen to his thrilling words. He bade me stay with him while he should consult his books, commune with himself, and, by necromantic lore, unfold each circumstance that could or thwart or speed, accomplish or defeat my enterprise.

“I consented; and, on the morning of the seventh day, he led me forth to a sequestered corner of the isle, where, in the dim light of a thick myrtle grove, he imparted to me the fruit of his occult labours.

“‘I cannot,’ said he, ‘assure you of a prosperous issue. Amaimon has a triple existence. He lives, while a monster who guards his den, by night and by day, and which has been engendered by his own unhallowed skill, cannot be destroyed—he lives, while the talisman that he ever wears next his heart, is unbroken;—and he lives, while the crucifix you seek remains in his possession. But the power he now exercises is held upon conditions that are bound up in the preservation of his threefold life. The monster destroyed, and it is sorely maimed—the talisman broken, and it is farther crippled—the cross recovered, and it is annihilated! It lies far, far beyond me, far beyond those instruments with which I can permit myself to work, to give you the certain means of victory. Nor would you, perchance, so choose it, if I could; for it would rob your enterprise of some of that glory which is to be won by an undaunted confronting of danger. My son! betide what may, your noble love of peril will not be stinted in its chivalrous desires. But I *can* arm you, as those who have gone before you were *not* armed; and in such way as will assist thy natural intrepidity. Wear this, (and he placed a golden SIGNET on my finger,) and if *thou* fail to redeem the Cross at first, *it* may redeem it for thee at the last. Whene’er thou wouldst know how, and what other aids will then be needful, break the seal of this scroll, and peruse it.—Therein is your fate, when that fate shall be linked with what that signet must perform to release you from it. But, mark me well! I command you, destroy them both by the agency of fire, and never read the one, nor permit the other to be invoked, unless, failing in your great enterprise, you fall beneath the accursed power of Amaimon; for his SLAVE you are, though you sorely maim, and though you farther cripple, if you do not ANNIHILATE him! I have told you I cannot assure you a prosperous issue; therefore can I not discover, though I have sought the knowledge thereof with much toil, whether thou shalt prosper. But mine art does inform me how thou wilt fare, missing what thou seekest, yet vanquishing what thou mayest. One thing more, and depart at thy pleasure. Either thou wilt perish, and thy bones whiten in the air, as theirs have done, who, like thee, have adven-

tured in this business—or thou wilt destroy the monster and break the talisman; or, finally, thou mayest achieve the conquest of the Cross. If the first, Heaven's will be done!—if the last, renown among men, and a reward, not of this world, await you—but if the second—let not twelve hours roll o'er your head, as you value your soul's health, ere you refuse the treasures of an empire, and accept—which part from never,—the seeming modest guerdon of a little ounce of human flesh.'

"He ceased. My deep attention had devoured each word he uttered. But, when I would have questioned him, to learn the fate I must tempt, in that failure which would make me Amaimon's SLAVE, he sighed, and bade me seek to know no more. I obeyed. We parted; and the evening sun beheld me again upon the waters in quest of this thrice defended necromancer.

"What befell me in Mauritania, thou knowest: at the least, so much as I could *then* tell, and shaped with such circumstances as I was *then* constrained to employ. Even at this distance of time, memory retraces the fierce vicissitudes, and the more than mortal agony of that dread encounter with a trembling hand. I slew the monster; I grappled with Amaimon in his den; I tore the talisman from his heart; I threw his pestiferous carcass to the earth, a black and strangled corse: but again his spirit was incarnate; and he re-appeared before me, in that same form he wore when he disputed with me this night, inch by inch, my entrance here! He held the crucifix aloft as then he did: I rushed upon him; but, with the scream of the famished eagle, when it stoops to pounce upon its prey, he exclaimed, 'SLAVE! I mark thee for my own!' The fiery blow was given—the burning impress was there—my brain was as if all Etna's flames consumed it; my eyes grew blind; I groped in vain to find Amaimon, and, when my vision returned, I was alone!

"I knew, in the bitterness of my own soul, what I had FAILED to do. But I had done a deed of service in the public eye, and I told you—Marmaduke Peverell—what mighty wealth, what wondrous riches I had earned. I told you, too, how I refused them all, and how I only claimed and obtained the prophetic Sibyl's elixir—the Yenarkon—the Giver of Life—the 'little ounce of hu-

man flesh,' which Barbazon, with fore-knowledge of its use, had admonished me to ask.

"The twelfth hour came, and then I knew my doom. Amaimon stood before me. I FELT his presence—I FELT he glared upon me—I FELT he breathed upon me—I FELT his power, like the ambient air, surrounding me, and pervading my whole frame. The very marrow in my bones confessed the searching poison. I was conscious, intuitively and instinctively, that I had become his SLAVE—that he could command me—that he could dispose of me—and that I was helpless. His look—but I need not describe *that*: you have not forgotten, you never can forget what it was, as your intrepid hand took the cross from the altar, and placed it in mine. Such it was, when he now first surveyed, in his SINGLE being, he who had brought him to it—he, who had for ever destroyed two of the links his devilish art had forged, to hold him to a world he ravaged and deformed.

"I heard my curse: it was brief and terrible. 'The lives thou hast taken, keep! they are yours. Groan beneath their bondage! I snap in twain the mingled yarn of mortal existence, which stretches from the cradle to the grave. In the deep earth, nor in the rolling sea, shalt thou find a grave. Slave of my power, be slave of my slave! Behold! the shadow follows not the substance more closely, than this thing shall be upon thy steps, to vex, torment, and worry thee!'

"It was then I saw MEPHOSTO, a filthy and malignant spirit, the abhorred fruit of a Moorish vampire, and a hag of Thessaly, whom Amaimon clothed in youthful beauty, and made prolific; while, ere her foul burden was ripe within her, she, in a trance, did cast it forth. He croaked a demon's fierce delight as he crawled towards me, and, touching the hem of my garment, exclaimed—'OBEY!'

"From that moment began my captivity. From that moment, till this night of my release at the altar, I endured a bondage such as I have described; a bondage, the chains of which, though I ceaselessly strove to break, I had long despaired of doing; so cunningly were they wound about me, and so impossible of achievement seemed the conditions of my redemption. Judge what hope could be

extracted from the task assigned me. I found a time to peruse the sealed scroll of Barbazon."

Fitz-Maurice drew forth a roll of parchment, and read from it. "This," said he "was

THE ORACLE.

' When an idiot shall die,
And a mother's heart breaks:
When an idiot shall live,
Who a father's life takes:
When the friend slays the friend;
And the first is the last,
He takes up the cross,
And thy sorrows are past.'

"And this," he continued, "was its dismaying interpretation, in

THE SCROLL.

" 'Thou art now Amaimon's slave, and must ever be so, till thou shalt find the means to fulfil the decree of the oracle, which thus I expound to thee:

" 'In some region of the globe, but place and time are hidden from me, thou must find the number of the Apostles—nor more, nor less—who, of their own free choice, shall be brought together, to inquire of a great mystery, by thee made manifest, according to thy will.

" 'When twelve are found, uninfluenced, save by their several humours, to know the causes of what they shall see or hear, they are subjected to *your* influence; but in whatso'er thou sayest to them, thou must disclose nor thyself—nor thy destiny—nor thine aim. Be towards them as man to man, and reach their wills by human instruments alone. Persuade, but command not; assume the oracle in thy responses, but only to sway their passions. Work wonders; but let not the wonder-working hand be visible. So shalt thou in the end, perchance, work out thy deliverance.

" 'For, if thou shalt thus be able to nerve their hearts and minds, against all the assaults of Amaimon's potent charms, thou art in the path of redemption. But thy task is nathless, full fraught with great and manifold difficul-

ties. Amaimon's power will cross thee at every step. He will blast their eyes and ears with sights and sounds of unutterable woe and horror. He will surround them with such appalling visions, and strike at their fears with such quick-coming terrors, as mortal spirits shall hardly have strength to cope with. Each time, too, that thou defiest him, he shall demand a life, which thou must grant, or forthwith abjure thy struggle with him, and remain his slave; or cast away the Yenarkon, and perish beneath his wrath. But though he can demand a life, and thou must grant one, the death of nature shall not follow, unless final defeat baffle thee; for in *thy* defeat will lie the ratifying sentence of *their* doom; till which they shall be but as sleeping images of death. When Amaimon perishes, all the sacrificed, by whose unforced immolation thou wilt have achieved his perdition, are thereby ransomed from his dark dominion. Heed well, my son, this condition of thy redemption, that thou mayest be worthy of thy redemption. Let not the blood of thy fellow man, like the inheritance of the prodigal, be cast to the winds; lest the waters of bitterness flow in upon thee, in the day of thy triumph. The manner of the sacrifice, too, lies with thee; as do the occasion, and the necessity; forasmuch, that if but one only of that mystic number faint, and doth forswear the ordeal, thou art constrained to renounce the rest, and in another region seek another number of the apostles.

“And it must fall out, that he, whoe’er he be, that is the *first* impelled to question the great mystery, shall nor flinch, nor waver, nor misdoubt himself even to the *last*: for by such a one, and such only, canst thou *at* the last, achieve the *LAST*. It is he, who must take up the cross, when Amaimon is COMPELLED to lay it down, which he shall never be, till the other eleven have braved him to the death. Yea! and he shall have power to take it again himself, if there be one sun rise ere it be removed.

“My son! the tangled thread of thy destiny is not yet unravelled. There must be an idiot’s death, and a mother’s broken heart. There must be an idiot living, and a dying father’s sentence pronounced by the innocent lips of an adoring daughter; and there must be a slaughtered friend, loved by the friend who slays him. In no page

can I read—by no communing with the world of spirits can I learn—by no lore I am master of, can I unfold, how these shall come to pass. I only know they are demanded of thee; and thou, foreknowing, must accomplish them. The signet thou wearest will bested thee much. It hath a mighty virtue; and is endued, as thou shalt prove, with wondrous qualities, while worn by thee. Parted from, it hath but THREE. It may command, ONCE, the spirit of the future; it may command, ONCE, the slave that commands thee; it may command, ONCE, Amaimon himself, when the Cross trembles in his grasp. And then—it is dross!

“Soldier of the holy sepulchre! Champion of the Cross! Wrestle with the powers of darkness, and return triumphant to Jerusalem!”

“I read and trembled. My doom was fixed. Despair took possession of me. It was not within human means to perform what I was enjoined, and yet *by* human means alone was I permitted visibly to work; while Amaimon might league all hell against me. My spirit drooped; hope forsook me. I was hourly on the rack, beneath the subtle malice of Mephosto; in whose refined torments I suffered all that a legion of fiends could have inflicted upon me; and often was I tempted, in desperation, to bid come the worst, by casting from me the Yenarkon. But a higher power, unseen, directed me. I groaned—I smote my breast—I gnashed my teeth in agony—but I LIVED!

“Three hundred years had thus rolled on, and I had suffered a million in anguish; for every moment was a year, reckoned by my torture. During that time I essayed, in vain, to discharge me of my task. In Africa, in Asia, on the shores of the Ganges, in the new-found world, in Europe, in my native Italy, in Greece, in Spain, in the frozen regions of the Laplander, the Dane, the Norweyan, the Swede, and the Muscovite, in the sunny plains and valleys of France, and in the mountains of Hungary, I sought the means of challenging Amaimon. Whithersoever he went, there followed I, and wrought my mysteries; as various in their character and outward show, as were the scene of each, and the people whose wonder I was to move. But there was ever some link wanting; ever some circumstance that failed me: some accursed

chasm, which left me to the scorn and mockery of Amaimon—to the avenging torments of Mephosto.

“At length the realm of proud and mighty England confessed his presence, and became my theatre. And there I found a Marmaduke Peverell, and a Helen Lacy! I know not why, but when first I looked upon this ocean queen—when first I surveyed her populous cities and her verdant plains—when first I breathed the air that freemen breathed, I felt as if it, or none, were the soil that was to give me freedom. How I have sped, this blessed moment best may tell.

“I selected St. Albans. Why? Because I had the power to know, that herein dwelt an idiot girl, a doting mother’s much loved treasure. I had never before had my enterprise so auspicated. To my mind, she was the hostage for the rest; the good and sure omen of what was to follow. I wrought my mystery. But two successive nights, the charmed fire curled round these walls, and shot through these dim windows in vain. I watched: no footstep came. The third, and if I failed, the last, I observed, unseen, you, Marmaduke Peverell, and your well-beloved friend, who now sits beside thee. I noted the cool, determined spirit, with which you rode up to the door, and *satisfied* yourself; and hope beat high within me. The next night came. I filled the hearts of hundreds with wondering terror. That night, the idiot girl perished! And thus was untwisted one thread in the tangled skein of my destiny.

“Amaimon, on the following day, appeared among your townspeople, who were met to deliberate what it was fitting, or best to do, touching the mystery of the over night. Fain would he have crushed at once the rising spirit I had kindled; and when that honest fanatic, Kit Barnes, avowed himself ready to ‘pass the Abbey doors ere the clock struck twelve, and abide the rest,’ Amaimon laid his demon hand upon him, breathing words of fire into his ears, that he might be staggered in his intents. I was passive here. Save that my thoughts were upon you, Marmaduke Peverell, I would not have used the signet’s power to make Mephosto lackey me, in freedom, while the evening star performed its bidden motions thrice round the moon.

"Midnight came. Amaimon arrayed himself in terror. Kit Barnes entered the Abbey, and you, (still addressing Peverell) calm and unruffled, stood without. You approached the door, and would have struck upon it. 'Twas I who made powerless your arm, and pronounced the words, *Thou fool, why so impatient? Thou art the last!* With a prophetic spirit, I had now marked you for the last, and I put your firmness to its test.

"Kit Barnes came forth. You inquired what had taken place. His answer was, *I am forbidden to tell!* Amaimon had wrought a vision here, darkly prophesying of that which must happen, if another, and another, and another night followed, mingled with such augmenting circumstances of horror, as had already, many a time and oft, been my bane. Then, breathing into his nostrils a withering poison which curdled the ruddy stream of life, he left him to die, when next the hour of midnight sounded in his ears. His lips he sealed in silence, to strike that terror which unrevealed danger doth ever breed, from the fancy's aptitude to coin what is most dreadful in what is most unknown.

"Chance did for me, what it had never done before. Chance, shall I call it?—No! It was the will of Heaven that I should here, at last, find the apostolic number. Twelve assembled within these walls.—Oh! as I sat, in silent agony, and looked upon you all that night, my spirit wept to think how you might fare, if I fared ill; how near was your doom, if the end of mine were still to elude me. But you were spared that pang which rings our nature most, when, full of life, we make sad preparation for the grave. You knew not your peril; and to die, being the tenure by which we live, to die only once, is a quit-tance upon easy terms, when we consider how many deaths there are to many, in the expectation of that once.

"Amaimon worked with all his power, for he feared the intrepid band that was now opposed to him. The effeminate Italian, the luxurious Asiatic, the volatile Frenchman, the phlegmatic German, the brute savage of the desert, and the barbarian infidel of the crescent, had confessed the mighty influence of his arts. But the cool, fearless, reasoning Englishman, who looks at danger with a prudent forethought how best he may leap the space be-

tween, then grapple, and after, never think of it—he had now to scare with the novelty of terror. He knew this, I say, and he worked with all his power. I was with you, but could cross him only in the beginning, and in the end. I diffused that balmy, roseate atmosphere, which dissolved your senses in the languor of luxurious repose.

“Knowing what now you do, you may imagine, better than I can describe, how my bosom swelled with increasing hope, when, as we were about to quit the Abbey, we were encountered by that grief-crazed woman, the mother of the idiot girl. The only, if there were any such, who had endured for an hour what I had for myriads of hours—they only, who could feel what I felt, at the glimmer of a mere possibility, that the moment of my release was at hand, can judge me when I say, my spirits staggered under the sudden rush of joy produced by those few words she pronounced in so sad a tone—*‘My heart is breaking, hour by hour!’* I heeded not her tale of the dead man’s dying throes—nor of his frantic visions—Amaimon’s work. I heard only her deep lamentations for her lost child—I saw only her haggard misery—and I thought only of the first of my required tasks:

“‘When an idiot shall die,
And a mother’s heart breaks.’”

“This would be the confession of a demon, were it not mine—the SLAVE of a demon, the price of whose liberty was to be paid down in these tears and in this innocent blood!

“Amaimon crouched beneath the recoil of his power that night, and trembled. I knew it, from the auxiliaries he employed: for, with his own hand, he anointed mine eyes with the blinding juice of a drug bestowed upon him by his mother, and the secret of whose composition died with that enchantress. The effect of this unguent was, that, for four-and-twenty hours, if I looked upon a mortal face, my visual orbs would melt away, as the icicle dissolves, in the warm sun-beam.

“Hence, I came not on the following night: but then it was I reaped the full harvest of Barbazon’s prescient care. I summoned to my presence my faithful NAPHTAL,

the Attendant Spirit of the Signet—communed with him—and swifter than a falling star shoots athwart the heavens, he left me to perform my bidding. I had commanded you to watch for signs—for I knew not what spell of Amaimon might keep *me* from you, though none could control the signet. *Naphtal* was Fortescue—the bearer of that packet, whose oracular lines were so aptly divined; and of that letter whose mystic import was no less shrewdly gathered, in all that appertained to its immediate intendment. Its first was for the time. Its last, for the last. *‘He that hath faith, shall have it.’* You all had faith in me, and you have all received faith from me. *‘I come not, but there shall be MANY the better, when there is ONE.’* You, Marmaduke Peverell, were the last—You were *the ONE*, and *ALL* live again, because yours was the consummating act of my ransom.

“My faithful *Naphtal* did me noble service. He returned with tidings of this perfect and exalted creature—Helen Lacy;—and of all the secret workings of her filial love. I saw, at once, the bright link that united her with my destiny. I read, as in a volume opened before me, the page which no lore that Barbazon was master of, could unfold. A conscious presage dwelt upon my spirit, that it was on this fair hand the signet, after having discharged itself of its triple quality, should become dross. A warning voice within me proclaimed the coming triumph. In all the past, I had never seen (nor had the knowledge thereof been imparted) a being surrounded with such circumstance to light the torch of hope, as was this incomparable maiden! And therefore, never till then, did *Naphtal* supplicate so eagerly, that he should work his own will, by the power he obeyed. For the first time, since Barbazon placed it on my hand, the signet was parted from; and I prepared to watch or shape the events that were to call forth its *THREE COMMANDS*.

“The meteors that flash in sudden radiance across a troubled sky, taking each moment new and fantastic shapes, may hardly compare with *Naphtal*, nimbly to assume what form soever, of living nature or of dead, of man, or of brute, or of inert substance, which the errand he would compass might demand. He it was who lured you (addressing Peverell,) in your morning walk, to

where, an instant after, he deftly lay before you, the image of a murdered man—of that Fortescue, upon whom you found the bridal gift of Helen Lacy's mother, which, with like dexterous speed, he had thither brought from the hovel of the sorceress. The hag, Margery Ashwell, was powerful and willing. But her skill, unaided by Naphthal, had been all too little to work my issues. By him instructed, and by him provided, when this maiden sought her, both first and last, she unravelled another of the tangled threads that bound me Amaimon's slave."

"Fitz-Maurice paused for a moment: then, bending his eyes upon Helen, whose countenance showed that she was under the same fascination while listening to him, as when her ear first drank the thrilling tones of his voice, he addressed her, in accents, tremulous with emotion, yet deep and solemn in their pathos, as he thus continued:

"It was glorious to behold how delicately Naphthal wove the web that enmeshed thee; how daintily he surrounded you, with apt devices, now a dream—now a harper's minstrelsy—and now a glittering miracle—such as best might sway the flexile fancy. In parting with that SIGNET, I surrendered to him the power and right to use what means and contrivances his own subtle spirit might devise to place it on thy hand, so that, in the fulness of time, thou mightest aid in striking off my fetters. How *he* sped, is told in how *I* have triumphed!

"Mine was the task, to awaken in thy gentle bosom those natural solicitations to thy will, which might incline it to act in a pre-ordained path with seeming freedom. The chord that vibrated deepest in thy heart, was filial affection. It was that I touched. But, as the sun is the source of universal light through all creation, so is the holy love that kindles for a parent, the source of every virtue that descends upon our kind. I had but to plead for pity, as a very wretch who had drained his cup of misery to the dregs, and sighs, and tears were the gracious harbingers of my successful suit. A father's weal was still the *first*—but it was no longer the *ONLY* object of thy prayers!"

A faint flush crimsoned the face of Helen as Fitz-Maurice uttered the last words. Her humid eyes had met the fond gaze of her father, while Fitz-Maurice spoke of the

“chord that vibrated deepest in her heart;” but she listened, with intense earnestness, to his recital of the means by which she had been wrought upon to perform her part in his deliverance. He now addressed them collectively again:

“After the second night, I found you wavering; and I had to persuade, ‘but not command,’ to ‘assume the oracle;’ to ‘work wonders;’ but ‘conceal the wonder-working hand.’ I did all. My persuasions, my oracular responses—and the liquid scroll within the cross, bound you to four nights more, ere which, I looked to accomplish the ‘*friend slaying the friend*.’ I was not defeated.

The third night, when I was with you, though Amaimon’s spells shrouded me in darkness, saw the mystic sacrifice of one who was friend and kinsman conjoined. That night, too, my trusty Naphtal, in frolicsome mood, punished the blustering curiosity of your brace of townsmen, who were fain to be contented with a mystery outside; instead of finding quick destruction within. Had they not been so buffeted home to their beds, a fiercer spirit would have sent them to their graves; for the addition of but one beyond the twelve was the perdition of all.

“Nor was it less the perdition of all if one of the twelve should ‘saint and forswear the ordeal;’ and hence the seeming fate of him of *The Rose*.” (Mine host quaked—but said nothing.) “You,” he continued, looking at Wintour, while a benignant smile beamed upon his features, as he noted his consternation, “*you would have fainted, and played the recreant, maugre your oath: ay—it was even so—and I see the confession of it in your looks—but Naphtal stopped your journey to Dunstable.*” “The appearance of mine host was now exceedingly sheepish.) “And how? With me, lay the ‘manner of each sacrifice,’ as also ‘the occasion and the necessity;’ and I *could* have protected myself by a less complex exercise of my privilege; but it was Naphtal’s delight, (and I could deny him nothing), to sport with reverend graybeards in the robes of office, and mock dull mortals with their own solemnities. In Milan, once, he walked a seeming criminal to execution: but when, upon the scaffold, the headsman thought to smite him with the axe, he

chopped the incorporeal air only, while the gaping multitude looked on and laughed to see the malefactor rise and walk away. So it was his humour here, to be the Venetian youth, or gipsy boy, whose father, a shadow like himself, had died for very want.

“I rejoiced in the power I had, on the fourth night, to wring a guilty soul!” The countenance of Fitz-Maurice darkened, as he fixed his eyes sternly upon Overbury, who hung his head, and spoke not. “The desire I had to do so, was one motive for my presence; the perfect means to do so, I owed to Helen Lacy’s intrepid calling for *the* SIGNET’S SECOND MANDATE. The abhorred Mephisto had thus become, for twelve hours, MY slave; and it was to torture him, more than he had ever tortured me, to make him work as then I did, *against* Amaimon. But I had another and a greater motive to show myself that night. HELEN LACY WAS MINE! I had won from her a troth-plight, with which I did not dare to dally. Moreover, I trembled to protract, by multiplying, the trials of your fidelity. And why did I tremble? For myself ALONE? No! God is my witness, that separate from the feeling which revolved round my own fate, deep and terrible was the one that revolved round the fate of those who were already as ‘sleeping images of death!’ Sharp and bitter was my torment, lest the fear of the future might come over those that remained, ere the ‘perdition of Amaimon should ransom all from his dark dominion.’ I wished not the ‘blood of my fellow man, like the inheritance of the prodigal, to be cast to the winds.’ Therefore, it was I swore you to myself last night; and, therefore, it was, I then defied Amaimon to a banquet of blood this night, which he could not refuse; but which, if he failed to quaff, to the LAST DROP, the cross was within my reach till sun-rise!

“Oh! how he tormented me the while! For he knew that I was fast escaping from his fangs, and so resolved to glut himself with vengeance. How, too, he stirred the inmost depths of hell, to arm him for the encounter: to blast each mortal sense with accumulated horrors! Even I, beheld, with inward terror, the visible workings of his power. It was a night to confound all nature, and strike mere man with frenzy.

"But first, he sought to shake *your* faith," addressing Peverell, "and craven *your* firm heart, by the smooth imposture of Conrad Geister. Defeated in that, he arrayed himself in stupendous might, and wrought the scene which followed. It was a subtle—a cunningly contrived one; so cunningly contrived, that I threw myself upon my only remaining chance, that of conjuring each of you to cast not one look behind. Your fidelity filled me with amazement. But it was the inspiration of Heaven that breathed such enduring courage into your hearts!

"Then came this noble maiden, whose sire, the '*eleventh who had braved Amaimon to the death*,' he grasped on the threshold of the phantom tomb, to keep from it. The rest had fallen, one by one, into those shadowy graves; which worked not their purposed dismay, because it was Naphtal's office to hang a vapoury cloud around them till the last approached; and so each, but the last, believed his danger faced him, and which still he seemed to escape.

"When," continued Fitz-Maurice, with a kindling energy of manner, which increased, at each word, as he spoke, "when 'the innocent lips of an adoring daughter pronounced a father's sentence;' when 'the cross trembled in Amaimon's hand'—and the THIRD COMMAND of the signet compelled him to relinquish his grasp—when I looked, and saw this incomparable creature ALIVE, but her reason in eclipse, then it was I knew there only remained that the 'first,' who, was *now* the 'last,' should 'take up the cross,' which Amaimon had laid, howling, upon the altar, before sun-rise. I did not fear you, Marmaduke Peverell! I did not fear you! Farther trials awaited you; but you had stood the assault, of Amaimon too bravely, to quail now. But what I *did* fear, was his glozing speech;—the gentle invitation to ask of Conrad Geister, at the twelfth hour, 'to close thine eyes in sleep till sun-rise.' I could not, for I dared not, unmask the device. I approached the altar! I sounded in your ears your own free oath! It was enough! The cross was mine! I triumphed!—The unclean spirit perished!"

Fitz-Maurice ceased. He had enjoined them not to speak, while he invoked the memory of the past; and now, when he was silent, there was no one among them master enough of his own thoughts to give them utterance. Much

of what he had said was still a mystery, which could become intelligible to all, only when they should be able to confer with each other. In a few moments he again addressed them; but his manner was more calm and subdued. The excitement of his feelings had subsided; the deep emotions awakened by his recital of what he had endured, and by the exulting consciousness of what he had achieved, had passed away.

"It is not meet," said he, "that I straight divest myself of the necromantic power I possess. For thrice three days and nights I must still employ it, before it is renounced for ever, and all my rest of mortal life spent in holy penance and devout thanksgiving for this deliverance. Whither I go shall be made known to you in due season. Look to find it so, ere gray hairs come. Peace is now restored to your affrighted town, by the triumph of that which is the emblem of all peace and good-will to man!"

Again he paused. Then, slowly and gracefully bending on one knee, he took the hand of Helen Lacy, which he pressed respectfully to his lips, exclaiming, in a voice slightly agitated:

"To thee, fair one, a prayer for pardon is earnestly proffered! Nobly have the daughter and the heroine shone in thy deeds! The God who hears me, and myself, alone know how I have pitied thee,—what endured, what offered to endure, that so *thou* mightest have been spared the sharpest of *thy* trials. But it was beyond me! I have knelt to you, before, in supplication, and you granted the boon I asked. I kneel to you now, in gratitude, and you will not refuse the offering. This SIGNET, which I thus remove, is vile and worthless, having discharged itself of its wondrous properties; but here is a gem, (and he placed a matchless chrysolite upon her finger) which Helen Lacy, perhaps, will deign to wear, in poor remembrance of him who must still be to her—Fitz-Maurice!"

He again pressed her hand to his lips, and arose; while Helen silently bowed her head, in token of acquiescence, without once venturing to lift her eyes towards him.

"The dawn approaches," he continued; "but no sunrise must greet me within these walls. May they never again be defiled by such abominations as we have seen?"

"Amen to that, with all my heart," responded Clayton, audibly.

"I am no seeker of forbidden things," said Peverell, after a pause, addressing Fitz-Maurice; "and when I ask you, as now I do, whether we part this hour for aye, you will answer me as it may seem meet to you, I should be answered."

"In this world, brave heart," replied Fitz-Maurice, "we meet no more!"

Peverell was silent. No one else spoke. A gentle sigh was breathed by Helen, as Fitz-Maurice, taking each by the hand, bade farewell. He grasped the hands of Peverell and Lacy (especially the former,) with visible emotion. Clayton and mine host manifested somewhat of a coy reluctance, and presented him only with the tips of their fingers, as if they had certain misgivings, in their own minds, touching the propriety of too familiar a contact with so questionable a personage. Fitz-Maurice smiled. As he passed Overbury, who stood sullenly aloof from the rest, he fixed his eyes upon him with a severe and terrible expression.

"I have no hand for thee—no parting word of friendship or of fellowship,—thou man of blood! Hence! And if this world's justice smite thee not, let every hour; yea, every minute, of the days thou art permitted to live, see thee on thy bended knees, seeking mercy and forgiveness from divine justice. Hadst thou as many years, as in thy natural course, thou canst have but moments, before thee, thou mightest well dread they would be all too few, for the atoning penitence that can wash out the deep stains of thy most guilty soul!"

Overbury, callous and reckless, as he had been, in the knowledge that his crimes were not written upon his brow, for all men to read, felt himself crushed to the very dust, when they were proclaimed aloud; and this solemn appeal to his conscience, which rung in his ears like his death-knell, filled him with awe. It was not till Fitz-Maurice, followed by the rest, had reached the doors of the Abbey, that he seemed to have power to move; and then, suddenly rushing past them, he fled towards his own house, filling the air with blasphemous cries, like a maniac.

When they quitted the Abbey, Mephosto galloped up,

leading by the bridle rein Fitz-Maurice's palfrey. He leaped to the ground, crouched before Fitz-Maurice, and croaked out, "I tarried till the hour, and you came not! At thy mighty bidding am I now come?"

Fitz-Maurice made no reply, but vaulting into his saddle, and waving his hand as he exclaimed, "Once more, farewell, to each and all of ye!" with the speed of an arrow, he and Mephosto vanished from their sight.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I HOLD it good," said De Clare, as they walked along, after the departure of Fitz-Maurice, "that the wonders we have to discourse of with each other, pass not our lips, till needful sleep, and some hours of silent meditation, string our minds and bodies for the conference. Such broken and disjointed speech as we now, perforce, must make, of what we have to impart, would be but like the flashes of a dying taper, thrown upon the coignes and out-jettings of a storied tapestry, which distort the little they darkly show, and leave the perfect whole unrevealed."

"This is certainly no hour for talking," replied Peve-rell; "and if it were, I have no tongue for words."

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed Mortimer, "such is not my condition. I have a tongue so overlaid with words, and a brain so crammed with matter waiting impatiently for words to play the midwife and deliver it, that my words and my matter are like two teams wedged in a narrow lane, the more they strive to relieve each other, the faster they stick together."

"I have never discovered," said De Clare, "that there was such a connexion between your tongue and your head, as your similitude implies."

"Nay, an' you talk of similitudes, mark you," added Owen Rees, "what similitude, I pray you, is there between the beginning and the end of these magics? For look you——"

"Ay," interrupted De Clare, "for, look you?—There are the glimmering streaks of awakening day; and let not its full opening eye stare broadly down upon us, like time-wasters, stealing to our beds at the lag-end of a night revel."

Thus they discoursed; but Lacy, Walwyn, and the others, were too much occupied with their own thoughts, to take any part in the conversation, and shortly after, they separated for their several homes.

What was the consternation, (and it must be hoped, the delight) of Dame Clayton, when she found she was no widow; what the amazement of mine host, when his arrival at *The Rose* disturbed the black-eyed Lucy in the arms of Tim the ostler, a full hour before her usual time of up-rising; what, his own surprise, to see their terror, and to feel that he was more than half persuaded he had actually been throttled in his bed, instead of riding to Dunstable; and what was the joy, at last, of the good Winifrid Wilkins, to look again upon her son Walter, though at first, the shock had nearly made her the thing she mourned,—all these, and all the grave perplexities, of Clayton, mine host, Vehan, and Wilkins, themselves, before they could discover the right clew to their own mysteries, must be left to the imagination of the reader.

With regard to the caitiff, Wilfrid Overbury, his end was as his whole life had been—a stain. In the frenzy of that guilt which had long tormented him in secret, and beneath whose scorpion-lash he now writhed, in its divulged enormity, he flung himself upon his bed. And oh! what a hell of torture raged within him! He could not hope for longer impunity, even in this world. The gibbet and the halter reared themselves before his eyes; the yells of loathing thousands sounded in his ears, as he swung, like a dog, from the scaffold: every artery in his body throbbed with agony. But it was a crisis of his fate, for which he had always held himself prepared, desperately resolved never to pay the forfeit of his crimes, by the hand of the public executioner. A small phial of subtle poison, the knowledge of whose deadly properties he had purchased of a Venetian bravo, and whose fatal virtues he had too often proved in deeds of dark revenge, he ever carried about him. Within an hour after he had quitted the Abbey, he drained its contents; and ere the beams of the morning sun streamed cheerfully through the windows of his chamber, the miserable suicide was beyond the reach of human punishment!

The shadows of evening had begun to fall the next day, when Peverell, De Clare, Mortimer, and all who had been partakers of these mysteries, assembled at the house of Lacy. The recital, by Peverell, of what had been his individual share of them, rivetted their atten-

tion. Then followed many a surprising tale from the rest, and many a fearful conjecture of what might have happened, if that which did happen had not taken place. The gentle Helen, too, had her miracles and her trials to recount; her visit to Margery Ashwell; the parting with her cross; her demanding of the signet from Peverell; her interviews with Fitz-Maurice; her darkly prophetic dream; and her bridal visit to the Abbey. The midnight chimes sounded, ere they had travelled through half the wonders they had to discourse of; and his worship, the mayor, whose presence on the occasion had been duly solicited, could not refrain from "thanking God that matters were as they were, and that it had not been necessary for him to attend her majesty's council upon the business."

And thus ended the marvellous history of the FIVE NIGHTS! But it was long ere those who could tell that history, found their task ended of recounting it to many a stranger who visited St. Albans, drawn thither by the wide-spreading rumour of its miraculous character. Years glided on, and still the promised communication from Fitz-Maurice came not, though gray hairs, and even death, had come to some, to whom that promise was made. His worship had lived to a good old age, and closed his eyes in peace, lamenting to the last the supineness of the council, which had neglected to send for him. Wilfrid Overbury's house fell to decay, because, in addition to its being under the ban of blood, in consequence of the murder of Sir Hubert de Falconbridge, the ghost of Overbury himself was seen every stormy night sitting astride the chimney, giving orders to his men as if he were still master of the SCORPION. A black mark, too, continued to be shown upon the bench at *The Rose*, where Reginald Fortescue had sat; and the field where his body was found by Peverell, was long after called *The Murder Field*; while Margery Ashwell was found, one Sabbath morning, hanging in the church porch, with a bible round her neck.

In something less than two years, Dame Clayton became safely a disconsolate widow. But she speedily took comfort to herself again, in matrimony; for she wedded, first, Peter Simcox, the doctor; secondly, Andrew Grim, the lawyer; and thirdly, a young man, aged twenty, ycleped Matthew Wincup, by trade a carpenter; who married her

money at Lammas, and buried herself, come Twelfth Tide following. Little Bridget, too, consented to espouse Andrew Stubbs, and became the fruitful mother of a numerous family of the Stubbs; while Crab, his worship's serving man, was set up by his master, shortly before his death, as mine host of *The Rose*, John Wintour, having removed to the sign of *The Boar* at Leicester. Owen Rees had retired into Wales, upon succeeding to ten acres of patrimonial rock, and seven goats, in his native county of Glamorgan. Mortimer, the gay and silken Mortimer, had betaken himself to the wars, and approved himself a good and valiant soldier, in many a hard-fought field.

Thus time crept on, and changes, such as have been recorded, followed in its ceaseless flow. More than thirteen years had elapsed, and of those who had sat the first night in the Abbey, seven only continued to reside at St. Albans: Walter Wilkins, Philip Vehan, De Clare, Walwyn, Hoskyns, Lacy, (who was tottering on the edge of the grave, with the gentle Helen for his constant companion,) and Marmaduke Peverell. In all that period, there had been no tidings of Fitz-Maurice. De Clare would sometimes remark, when adverting to his departure on the last night, that "he had disappeared with the speed of an arrow, and, like the arrow, had left no trace, behind, of his course."

It was towards the close of a wintry day, in the middle of December, 1584, that a stranger presented himself at Peverell's door, and inquired for him. He was conducted into his presence, and being seated, forthwith communicated his errand, in such graceful speech, as be-seemed his carriage and apparent condition.

"I have no manner of doubt," said he, having ascertained that Peverell's baptismal name was Marmaduke, "that I fulfil my promise in delivering this sealed packet to you. Of its contents," he continued, "I know nothing; but I shall briefly impart how it came into my keeping. I am on my return home, after a journey of three years and more, to Egypt, the Holy Land, and Italy. While at Jerusalem, I sojourned with Pater Guardian, as he is called, of the monastery of the Franciscans, in that venerable city; a very reverend old man, who, when he

learned I was of England, and tending thitherward my vagrant steps, did desire of me, right earnestly, to charge myself with this office. He enjoined me diligently to seek you out, and deliver this into your own hands, adding thereto, that it was from one PIETRO MANFRONI, of Apulia, but then, a holy anchorite, vowed to solitude and prayer. It hath pleased Heaven that I should prosper in mine errand, and that thou shouldst receive into thine own hand, what I now most gladly deliver."

Peverell took the packet. It was folded in a silken cover, sealed with three seals, suspended by purple ribands, and directed for "Master Marmaduke Peverell, St. Albans, England."

"I cannot say," said Peverell, after a short pause, and examining attentively the seals, all of which bore the impress of a crucifix, "that I am known to, or have any knowledge of, such a person as you have named. Yet I doubt not, you have rightly sped in your errand; for the trouble whereof, accept my very hearty thanks. May I crave to know your name?"

"Henry Heicroft," replied the stranger; "and I am speeding with what haste I can to my home, which lieth in Warwickshire. I have been a truant longer by twelve months, than I promised to be, when I set forth upon my journey."

Peverell pressed him to stay the night and refresh; but he would not be persuaded, saying, "Every hour I now lose in England will be more reproach to me, than all the months I have added to my absence in foreign countries." He therefore took his departure, with much courtesy; and when he was gone, Peverell, with an impatient hand, broke the seals of the packet. Enclosed within the silken cover was a letter from Fitz-Maurice, beautifully engrossed upon vellum; which he had no sooner perused than he forthwith invited to his house, that same evening, De Clare, Wilkins, Vehan, Hoskyns, Walwyn, Lacy, and his daughter Helen. He communicated what had passed between himself and Master Henry Heicroft, and then read to them the epistle, of which he had been the bearer. They listened to it, not without emotion, especially Helen; for it seemed to them like the last memorial, except what lingered in their own recol-

lections, of the wondrous mysteries which had followed them at every step of their FIVE NIGHTS!

This was the letter:—

“To the Right Noble, and Incomparably Esteemed, Marmaduke Peverell. Pietro Manfroni sends this, from the Holy City, greeting him with much Love and Honour: the Grateful Offering of him, who, in his Bondage, was Fitz-Maurice; who, in his Redemption, is the Servant of God; and who, in his Supplications to Heaven, forgetteth not the Heart and Hand that wrought his Deliverance.

“The Holy Cross now hangs again in the Sanctuary of the Temple of the Sepulchre; and Pietro Manfroni, the Anchorite of Mount Calvary, never kneels before it, in pious adoration and wrapt devotion, without remembering, in his prayers, that Marmaduke Peverell and Helen Lacy ransomed him from bondage: from a bondage which robbed him of the only common birthright of man—the privilege to die!

“Peace be with you, if this find you living! The peace of God be thine, if the grave hath received thee! Once, in every four and twenty hours, I sit beside mine own; welcome it as a kind friend I had deemed for ever lost; and await, with humble resignation, but ceaseless hope, my summons to make it my dwelling-place!”

THE END.

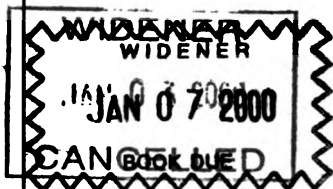


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